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A FEW TESTIMONIALS

Valley Falls, N. Y., Sept. 5, 1907.
It was my privilege to spend a week in Elmira during August, during which time I saw the practical working of the Philo System of Keeping Poultry, and was surprised at the results accomplished in a small corner of a city yard. "Seeing is believing," they say, and I had not seen, it would have been hard to believe that such results could have followed so small an outlay of space, time and money. (Rev.) W. W. Cox.

Oct. 22, 1908.
P. S.—A year's observation, and some experience of my own, confirm me in what I wrote Sept. 5, 1907. The System has been tried so long and by so many, that there can be no doubt as to its worth and adaptability. It is especially valuable to parties having but a small place daily for chickens; seven feet square is plenty for a flock of seven. (Rev.) W. W. Cox.

Ransomville, N. Y., Dec. 5, 1908.
Dear Sir:—Last spring we purchased your book entitled "Philo System" and used your heatless brooders last spring and summer. The same has been a great help to us in raising chicks in the health and mortality. The chicks being stronger and healthier than those raised on the brooders with supplied heat. We believe that this brooder is the best thing out yet for raising chicks successfully. We put 25,000 chicks through your heatless brooders this last season and expect to use it more completely this coming season. We have had some of the most noted poultrymen from all over the United States here, also a large amount of visitors who come daily to our plant, and without any exception, they pronounce our stock the finest and healthiest they had seen anywhere this year.

Respectfully yours, W. R. CURTIS & Co.

SKRIPPLETON, N. Y., May 5, 1908.
One article of the Philo System entitled "A Trick of the Trade," has been worth three times the amount the book cost. I saved on my last hatch fifty chicks which are doing nicely. W. B. RASE.

THE CAVALIER

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THE CAVALIER

Vol. II.

APRIL, 1909.

No. 3.


MASTERS OF CIRCUMSTANCE.

BY THEODORE ROBERTS,
Author of "Captain Love," "The Red Feathers," etc.

A SERIAL STORY.

CHAPTER I.

THE HOME-COMING.

OR the past six days—since first regaining the fringe of the settlements—the little force had been gradually disbanding. Woodsmen, trappers, pioneer farmers, traders, millers, planters, and gentlemen of rank and fortune—singly or by twos and threes, they had broken away and gone back to their homes and private affairs.

For two months they had campaigned in that alluring but menacing wilderness that lay, unfathomed, between the cultivated lands and the unknown West. Now, when the forest foliage was reddening under the frosts of late October, and a healthy regard for the rifles of the Virginian militia had been implanted in the shifty hearts of two tribes of savages, they felt free to return to their interrupted businesses and pleasures.

At last, where Saddle Hill Trail branches off from the king's highway, Master Francis Drurie and Captain Simeon Hewett drew rein and shook hands.

"Good luck to you, Frank!"

"And to you, Sim—God bless you!"

Then Hewett wheeled toward Saddle Hill, touched spur to his thin nag, and lifted his hat. Drurie returned the salute, and trotted eastward along the highway.

And thus had six companies of Virginian riflemen—men in homespun, buckskin, blue and gold, coonskin caps and laced hats—disbanded, without the sanction of general orders, or any blowing of trumpets. These were soldiers, not mummers. The rifle-work and the sword-work were over for the season. Their duty to their country was done for the time. God grant them to find their families still intact, their cabins and houses still standing, and their crops garnered in good order!

Francis Drurie's coat of fine blue cloth was patched and ripped and weather-stained. His hat was faded, and the gold lace of it tarnished beyond reburnishing. His saddle was black with wear and wet and sunburn. On his legs he wore breeches of buckskin; and his high boots of English leather had been replaced weeks before by beaded moccasins and fringed leggings. He carried a long flint-lock rifle slung across his shoulders, pistols in his holsters, and a sword at his side.

His face was tanned to a red-brown as deep as an Indian's; and from that savage-hued mask his blue eyes shone out with startling brightness. His light brown hair, where it lay on his neck unpowdered, and tied with a narrow ribbon, was bleached by the sun to the shade of ripe corn-husks. He was slender of figure, and but little above the medium height of men of his race; but he was well-muscled and well-fea-

tured, thin and hard as a hound, and with courage in eyes and brow to be read at a glance. For all his service-worn equipment, and sixty days of campaigning, he sat straight and rode lightly.

At a gap in a hedge barred with rails, Francis Drurie dismounted. Here began a shaded path which he knew; and by it he would ride, coolly and free of dust, across the groves of Fairwood Manor and Admiral's Pride, and into the arms of his family. He lowered the rails, led his horse over, and swung to the saddle.

The narrow path was carpeted with short, thin grass as soft as moss. The hoofs of his horse made no sound. Suddenly across the still air, fragrant with the breath of ripened leaves and mellow earth, and cones purpling in the sun, lifted a voice, singing. Francis knew the voice; and these are the words of the verse he heard:

Time is old and life is brief—
Then 'tis shame to prate of sorrow.
If to-day holds naught of grief,
Let the good God mind to-morrow.
Time is old, but Youth is strong;
Life is brief, but Love is long.

Francis drew rein, smiling. The singing had ceased, the sweet voice dropping to silence as suddenly as it had sprung upon the drowsy air. He reflected for a moment, and then struck up the last verse of the familiar song.

Ride ye south and ride ye north—
You'll be riding home to-morrow
Back from whence ye cantered forth
With your sears and weary sorrow.
Time is old and Death is strong;
Life is brief, but Love is long.

A moment's silence followed the conclusion of the young man's effort; then came a short, glad cry—stifled almost as soon as uttered—from somewhere down the woodland path. The tanned cheeks of the campaigner flushed at the sound. He waited, tense in the saddle. The horse began to fidget, knowing that there was no ambush of painted savages to fear in the woodlands of the manor.

Puzzled by the silence, and wondering abashed at the note of that brief cry, Francis let the horse move forward; then on second thought he sprang to the 'ground, caught the reins up on one

of the holsters, and walked briskly ahead. The horse followed quietly.

In this manner they moved along for a considerable distance, the young man expecting to catch sight of the girl at every turn of the path, and at every turn wondering more and more why she did not appear. He increased his pace, and soon saw the gleam of a white frock between the forest walls in front. *She was moving away from him.*

"Isobel, Isobel!" he called, and broke into a run.

She did not turn until he was within a few yards of her. Then she sprang aside, and faced him with feigned amazement in her splendid eyes. There was another emotion there which the amazement could have hidden only from persons with as little experience in such matters as young Drurie.

"Frank!" she cried.

Laughing, he tried to catch her in his arms; but she slipped out of his embrace, and held him away with one light hand. Her brow and cheeks were bright with fleeting color. Her eyes looked past him, dark as deep water, but bright as stars. Everything about her was bright, and yet of a brightness that was as tender as dimness—as tender as the half-lights of dusk and dawn. Though her eyes and hair were so dark that they often looked black, her skin was of a wonderful fairness. About her white neck gleamed a thin gold chain, holding just below the tender hollow of her throat a small gold cross set with pearls which Francis had given her on a birthday several years ago.

"Have you dropped from the tree-tops?" she asked.

Young Drurie did not answer immediately. He stood with his arms hanging at his sides, his forehead puckered ever so slightly, smiling, but with cross-lights of puzzled inquiry in his blue eyes.

"From the tree-tops, if you like—from thousands and thousands of miles of tree-tops—but it was harder than dropping, as Jumper, here, could tell you," he said. "But what tricks are you up to, Isobel?" he asked anxiously. "Why don't you laugh at me? Why don't you kiss me? Why don't you make fun of my shabby coat and brick-red

face? You are not natural, Isobel. I heard you singing a long time ago—and I sent a voice back to you. And you heard it, I think. Then why did you turn around and run straight away from me? That was not kind, Isobel."

She did not meet his steady regard.

"I did not run," she said.

He let that pass for the little it was worth.

"You were sorry when I went away. I thought you would be glad when I got back," he said gravely.

"I am glad!" she cried. "You know I am glad!"

"It is not for me to presume to deny what you say, dear; but you do not behave as if you were very glad," he returned gently. "You are changed, little girl. I did not expect to find you changed in any way. I have always thought that you would be as glad to see me home again as you were sorry to see me go away."

"When did you think about it?" she asked, mock incredulity in her voice. "Do you expect me to believe that you, a full-fledged soldier of Virginia, gave any time to such foolish reflections? Be honest, Frank, and tell me when you thought about whether I should be glad or sorry to see you home again. I am sure it was not when you were fighting with the savages, or eating in their lodges, or riding through the forest with your comrades."

The young man gazed at her in undisguised amazement.

"Why do you ask me such idiotic questions, Isobel?" he complained. "But I shall answer them, though I do not think them sincere. Honestly, then, I often made pictures of our meeting in my mind—while we marched, and when I lay in my blankets at night; and ever since I parted with Hewett at the crossroads I've been thinking how fine it would be to—to—"

"To what?" she asked.

"To kiss you again," he said.

"Oh!" exclaimed the girl softly, her eyes intent on his beaded moccasins.

"I really thought I was going to do it. My mind was set on it," he ventured.

"And you didn't, after all."

"I don't kiss by force," he said, smiling forlornly.

"Frank," she said in a changed voice, "you must realize now that we are no longer children."

"Children!" he cried in mild indignation. "Children! Who says we are children? True, you are only eighteen—but I am twenty-two. Children don't command companies of riflemen campaigning in the wilderness." He laughed boyishly at his own big talk. "But, in all seriousness," he added, "why have I not as much right to kiss you, now that I am a man, as I had when I was an unappreciative child?"

"But you know that you have not," she replied quietly.

A change came to Francis Drurie's tamed face. The whimsical light faded from his blue eyes, and his lips straightened a little. "You are wiser than I am, my dear Isobel," he said. "You realize my position better than I do myself. It is evident that you have given some thought to the matter. The elder sons—the heirs to the tobacco-fields and slaves—are the fortunate fellows, who retain the privilege of kissing their lady friends after arriving at the age of manhood. The poor, unfortunate devils who have their own way to make in the world must learn discretion all of a sudden. I'd not thought of that, but I see the good sense of it clear enough. I shall now kiss your hand, my dear, by way of greeting between old playmates after an absence of two months—and then I'll let the argument drop. May I venture?"

"No, you may not," she replied with spirit. "You have spoken very unkindly. Because I ask you to remember that we are no longer little children, you instantly speak as if—as if I do not care for you any more because—because you are not the heir to Admiral's Pride. I do not care for Admiral's Pride! You are—very unkind."

"I beg your pardon most humbly, Isobel," said Francis anxiously. "God knows I do not want to think that! We've been the best of friends ever since you came to Virginia, little girl; so why squabble just because you have suddenly become impressed by your great age? That would be childish, certainly. I am sorry that I have caused you any anxiety—and still more sorry that I have spoken unkindly. But if your voice

shakes again, dear, as it did just now, I'll kiss you—though they hang me for it."

Isobel looked swiftly into his eyes, and as swiftly away again. Then, as if working for a wager, she asked him questions about the wilderness, the savage tribes, the fighting, the marching, and the wild animals he had encountered. And while she questioned and he answered they moved forward, side by side, with the horse close at their heels.

The path was so narrow that his right hand presently touched her left. In a second their fingers clasped and held: and so they moved along, talking briskly, though somewhat vaguely, and each pretending unconsciousness of what had happened. In the depths of the woods they crossed a low stone wall that separated Fairwood Manor from Admiral's Pride.

"Now, I must go back to the manor. I am spending the day with Uncle Henry," said the girl. As she spoke she gently withdrew her hand from the young man's. He did not try to retain it. He made no sign of knowing that his hand had been anywhere but in his own pocket.

"And to-morrow?" he asked.

"I shall be at home to-morrow," she replied.

"Then I'll ride over in the morning," he said. "I have some interesting specimens of picture-writing for your father's collection."

He swung to the saddle, lifted his hat and let the eager horse start off at a sharp trot. Where the path broke through the underbrush into a wide avenue that led up to the house of Admiral's Pride he turned and glanced back. The girl was still standing where he had left her, gazing down the green pathway. She blew a kiss to him and vanished in a twinkling.

CHAPTER II.

THE BROTHERS.

IN those days there were not many finer estates in Virginia than Admiral's Pride, and few finer residences than Captain Paul Drurie's. The estate had been first settled and cleared, and the

house built by the captain's father, old Rear-Admiral Drurie. The admiral, in his day, had been a hero in the eyes and hearts of the English public, and was affectionately known in every ship of the navy as "Hot-Shot Bill."

In front of the house lay six acres of velvety lawn and well-tended shrubberies. The park itself—woodlands of oak, walnut, and cedar—covered one hundred acres. The house, with its offices and lawns, kennels and stables, occupied the center of the park. Back of this block of land were the negro quarters, the great cattle-sheds, the windmill and tobacco-houses, and hundreds of acres of meadow, pasture, and forest, and the fields where the corn, tobacco, and sugar-cane were raised. Yes, it was a fine home to which young Master Francis Drurie rode back, in his shabby coat and Indian moccasins, astride his weather-blackened saddle.

A couple of hound puppies were the first of the household to catch sight of the horseman. They charged across the lawns to meet him, yelping with delight at the prospects of a little excitement. When the man spoke to them, and they saw that the raw-boned horse was no other than Jumper, their demonstrations immediately took on a subdued note.

Next, an old hound, gray of muzzle, and with one eye like a clouded opal, got to his feet on the lower gallery, sniffed the air inquiringly for a moment, and then descended to the lawn at a dignified trot. This was Bellringer, who had led the pack for seven years, and for three had loafed about the galleries, honorably retired from the field because of stiffening joints and a thickening windpipe. At sight of him Francis drew rein and dismounted.

The dog quickened his pace a little, and began to twist his long tan-and-white body as the lad drew near. He settled lower on his legs, drew back his gray upper lip and displayed a couple of white fangs. From deep in his rusty throat came a gurgling growl—a growl as expressive of welcome and joy and love as any human cry. He lifted himself stiffly to his full height and planted his front paws on the young man's breast; and, standing thus, he yelped with all his strength.

It was old Bellringer's yelping that

announced to everybody in and about the house that the militiaman was home again from the wilderness. The captain left his book open on the study table and hobbled onto the lawn. The ancient butler—who had been a gunner's-mate aboard the captain's ship—followed close. Mrs. Drurie sped from her bedroom to the rail of the upper gallery, looked eagerly about and, with a little scream of delight, turned and fled back again, down the great staircase and out to the lawn. From the majestic old cook in her red-and-yellow turban, to the youngest housemaid in spotless white cotton and white headkerchief, all the black house servants appeared and formed a group behind the master, the mistress, and the privileged old white butler.

Francis Drurie embraced and kissed his mother, shook the captain's hand for a full minute—all the time the two grinned feelingly at each other without a word—and then gave a cordial grip to the old hero who had descended comfortably from serving his guns on the seas, under both Hot-Shot Bill and Captain Paul, to serving soups and wines ashore. To the group behind them he waved a hand, and called a good-natured greeting.

"Where is John?" he asked presently, looking up at the house.

"John? Why, John is shooting with Fairwood to-day," replied the captain.

Mrs. Drurie smiled.

"I think he is not paying much attention to the birds. Isobel is there, too," she said.

At that the captain turned squarely upon her.

"So that is what you have in your mind!" he exclaimed amusedly.

"He is certainly paying much more attention to her than he used to," replied the lady.

The campaigner gave a keen ear to this conversation, but said not a word. As was usual with him, he thought the more for saying nothing.

John Drurie and Mr. Fairwood appeared early in the afternoon, for the news of the Indian fighter's return from the wilds had sped over three plantations with the despatch of the wind. John was honestly pleased to see his brother safe and sound again; but it looked as

if Mr. Fairwood, of Fairwood Manor, was even more pleased.

"I heard one of the plowboys yelling to another across a forty-acre field that you had got home again," he said. "There was a covey of partridges in the air, right in front of my gun. Well, lad, I let them go. There's not a bird that flies would have tempted me to wait and pull trigger. 'Frank's home,' I sang out to John, and ran for the house, leaving my dogs in the stubble. Yes, lad, I put my best foot foremost, you may depend upon it. I knew old Gunner's-mate Joskins would be mixing one of those three-decker punches of his."

True for you, Mr. Fairwood—Joskins had mixed the punch, and a famous one it was.

But Francis was not in a mood to enjoy it fully. He felt a restlessness that he could not account for—a restlessness of the mind rather than the body—and a depression of spirit equally unreasonable. Fresh from a bath, clothed in the fine linen and unstained garments of prosperity, with the great punch before him on the gleaming mahogany, and his father, his brother, and Fairwood, of Fairwood Manor, near him, yet he moved uneasily in his chair, and glanced continually through the long window of the dining-room into the garden where the gold of the sunlight was deepening on stalk and leaf.

The talk seemed trivial to him, though it was the talk of his class and his country—of crops, dinners, men, dogs, and horses—subjects that had always interested him keenly until the present moment. Even the incidents of the campaign had dwindled to insignificance in his eyes. In answer to the questions of the men he told them of the skirmishing, the hardships, the fine shooting of the pioneers, the customs of the tribes, and what-not; but he spoke without his usual warmth—a fact that was as noticeable to the others as to himself.

"You are tired, lad," said the captain anxiously. "You should turn in and sleep the clock around."

"No, sir, I don't feel tired," replied Francis. "I have had plenty of sleep in the last week since we got out of the dangerous country. We slept lightly before that out of respect for our scalps.

But I feel a trifle restless, and that's a fact. It may be owing to the sudden change from constant alertness and poor fare to this sort of thing." He looked at the great silver bowl. "Perhaps I have acquired the habit of work. It may be that I miss the fatigue and excitement of the life I have been living for the past two months."

"Cheer up, lad," said Mr. Fairwood. "You'll get fatigue and excitement enough next week, for we hunt the Dudley country on Monday, the Swan River country on Wednesday, and Saddle Hill on Saturday."

"Good!" exclaimed Francis, for he was a keen sportsman, and the best gentleman rider in the county, either at flat-racing, cross-country, or steeple-chasing.

"But Jumper looks thin and unfit," said the captain. "He'll need a deal of graining before Monday."

"Don't hunt him for a fortnight, lad," advised Mr. Fairwood. "Let him rest, and take the pick of my stud until he is fit for work again."

"But you offered me a mount, sir, until Snowball's shoulder hardens," said John, smiling.

Mr. Fairwood turned a haughty glance in the speaker's direction. He had gray eyes, easily warmed to good nature or chilled to displeasure. He was famous for saying what he felt.

"But?" he questioned, in a voice of indignation. "What d'ye mean, John, by saying 'but' to me? I offered you a mount, sir, and you may be sure that the offer still holds. Any friend of mine, or son of a friend, or friend of a friend, is welcome to a horse from my stables, or a bottle from my cellar, whenever he wants it. But did I offer you the best? No, John, I did not. You will have to put up with the second best."

John was too thoroughly abashed to even try to reply. Francis felt sorry for him, but could not help thinking that an occasional facer of the kind would do him no harm. John took it too much for granted that the best of everything should be his. The captain looked neither abashed, sorry, or amused. He refilled Mr. Fairwood's glass from the half-pint ladle, then looked fixedly at his elder son.

"How is it," he asked, "that Admiral's Pride is so short of hunters?"

"I—I do not know, exactly," replied John.

"But you should know," retorted the captain. "I put the stables in your charge six months ago. If you cannot manage the stables alone, how will you ever run the whole estate? John, I am deeply distressed. Here we are—and for the first time in the history of Admiral's Pride, I'll wager—short of horses at the start of the hunting season."

Mr. Fairwood could not bear to hear any one taken to task. He gulped his punch, stared round the room with a swiftly melting eye, and at last focused his gaze upon the captain.

"Come, Paul, you must not be so hard on the youngster," he cried. "He is at the age when most men are fools, anyway. All he thinks of now is dressing himself up in fine clothes from London, but he may outgrow that. He may make a fine, sensible man some day, Heaven knows."

Captain Drurie roared with laughter. Francis turned his head away, to hide a smile that he could not keep from his face. John glared at Mr. Fairwood, reckless with the sting of injured pride.

"Do you realize," cried the furious heir, "that you are speaking of a man of twenty-five years of age—of a bachelor of Oxford University, sir; of a gentleman and a scholar?"

Fairwood, who thought he had been figuring very tactfully as a peacemaker, gaped at the young man in pained astonishment. Fortunately the ridiculous side of the affair struck him before his rage exploded, and he joined the captain in wide-throated laughter. John sprang to his feet and marched from the room.

When his seniors had finished their laughter, Francis said: "You were too sharp, Mr. Fairwood. He will sulk for a week."

CHAPTER III.

ISOBEL'S FUTURE.

BEFORE leaving the dining-table and the silver bowl Francis won from Mr. Fairwood an acknowledgment of the fact that John had not

been treated fairly. The captain took no part in the argument, but sat far back in his chair, with his eyes turned to a portrait of Hot-Shot Bill. It was a belief of his that two are enough for any argument. As soon as Mr. Fairwood had admitted that he really thought very highly of John, and had not meant more than half of what he had said, Francis excused himself and left the room.

Francis found John up-stairs, in a little room full of books, sulking in the window-seat.

"John," said the campaigner. "Mr. Fairwood wants you to know that he did not mean what he said of you, and that he is sorry he said it. He has the highest regard for your scholarship, John."

"Scholarship!" cried the other. "What is the use of scholarship in this barbaric hole? Here a rifleman in a coon-skin cap is of more account than a poet; and if a gentleman can stick to the back of a half-broken colt he is looked upon as the possessor of a liberal education. Horses and dogs, tobacco and rum, fighting and sleeping—Lord, there is not a man in the colony capable of lifting his brain above these things!"

"Oh, come now, John, you are talking like an idiot," said Francis, laughing good-naturedly.

"If I talk like an idiot, I am driven to it," replied John. "Why was I sent to England and Europe for my education if I am not to be allowed to continue the life? What do I care about the stables? The grooms can manage the feeding of the horses quite well without my help. I have more important work to do; and, by Heaven, I'll do it!"

"What is the work?" asked Francis.

"Why should I tell *you*?" retorted John. "There is only one person in Virginia who cares the snap of a finger about my work."

"Who is that?" asked Francis.

"Isobel," replied the elder brother, without a moment's hesitation, and looking at Francis, as if he expected some indication of special interest.

"You are fortunate," said the other indifferently. And then: "I should like to know what it is that interests Isobel."

"A history of Rome."

"Rome?"

"Yes, and in verse."

Francis was honestly astonished. He had never suspected John of the staying power to attempt so monumental a work as a history of any kind, either in verse or prose. Of course he had often heard the other speak of his work, but had never seen anything of it except a few dismal lyrics.

"Is it done?" he asked, in an awe-struck voice.

John was disgusted with the question.

"This sort of thing is not done in two months," he replied superciliously. "It is rather more difficult than a campaign against a handful of savages."

"And will, no doubt, be responsible for more deaths," retorted Francis, as he hastened from the room. He had never, in all his life, found John in quite such a beastly humor.

Next morning, shortly after breakfast, Francis Drurie set out on foot to call on Mr. Richard Dariza, Isobel's father. The Dariza place was named Hopeland, and lay just the other side of Fairwood Manor. It was a small estate, with a small, new house upon it, and had once been a part of the manor. Francis carried a parcel, in which were a number of examples of Indian picture-writing for Mr. Dariza and a necklace of strange gems for Isobel. He crossed the Fairwood lands without attracting the attention of any one, at the house—to have done so would have meant delay and a second breakfast—and arrived at the Dariza place just as the master himself stepped from the breakfast-room to the gallery.

Richard Dariza was a Spaniard by birth. Years ago, in his native land, he had been well known in high places as the Señor Ricardo Alcazardo da Riza. There had been trouble of a family and political nature, and Da Riza had Anglicized his name and turned his back forever on his own country. A year or two later he married Miss Fairwood, of Virginia. This happened in London, and for twelve years they made their home in England. Two children were born to them—the first a boy, the second a girl.

When Isobel was in her fifth year the mother fell very ill. This was in mid-winter. Dariza was almost crazed with terror, and immediately removed his family to the south of France. There Mistress Dariza recovered something of her

strength, but she talked continually of her home in Virginia, and grieved for it. As soon as the doctors said that she was strong enough to undertake a sea-voyage her husband engaged passage for his family from Bristol to the great colony. The voyage was made in safety, but within a month of their arrival, at the home of her people, Mistress Dariza died.

Another great blow awaited the unfortunate Spaniard. It fell some ten years later, when his son, Richard Fairwood St. George Dariza, a young lieutenant in the navy, quarreled with a senior officer, killed him in fair fight, and vanished as completely from the knowledge of the Admiralty and his family as if he had descended into his grave.

Dariza's thin face and dark eyes lighted with pleasure at sight of young Drurie. He hastened across the gallery and down the steps, and caught his visitor's hand in both of his.

"To see you again is like wine to my tired spirit," he said.

Francis flushed with pleasure at the greeting. Such words, from his father or Mr. Fairwood, would have sounded foolish and stilted, but from the master of Hopeland they were natural and sincere. He returned the pressure of the other's thin hands. Dariza led the way back to the breakfast-room. He looked more like a man of eighty than fifty-five. Tall and of frail build, his two great griefs had bent him, body and spirit, and thinned his blood like a fever. And he had a way, recently acquired, of turning his head suddenly and lifting a furtive hand to his eyes. Sometimes he would smile to himself, very tenderly and longingly, and that was more pitiful to see than tears.

Francis refused a second breakfast, but accepted his host's offer of coffee and tobacco. Isobel soon entered the room, and spoke to Francis in subdued voice and with a fleeting glance. He had already given the sheets of bark and skin containing the picture-writing to Dariza, and now he extended the Indian necklace to the girl.

"Here is a little gift that I have brought out of the wilderness to you, Isobel," he said. "I was told that it once belonged to an Indian princess."

Isobel flushed and hesitated.

"It is very valuable," she said, and glanced appealingly at her father.

"Take it, dear," said Dariza. "You need have no scruples about accepting any gift from Francis Drurie."

Both knew what he meant, for of late he had often spoken of the place that Francis had taken in his affections since the loss of his son.

Drurie fastened the splendid, glowing thing about the girl's neck. His hands trembled as he did it, and a mad desire to stoop and touch his lips to the white flesh beneath his fingers went through him like fire. But instead of that he said, in a level voice: "It has a difficult catch, but I think I have fastened it properly."

Soon afterward Isobel left the room. The two men sat silent for a long time, sipping their coffee and smoking their silver tobacco-pipes. Clay, as material for pipes, was not yet popular with the gentry, either in England or the colonies.

"Francis," said Dariza at last, "I feel that I am not much longer for this world."

Drurie looked at him in consternation.

"It is so," continued the other. "No skill of ours can alter it—the message is in my heart. I am an old man—not in years, but in life—and the taste for earthly pleasures is dead in me. I think that I shall never again see the tobacco harvested from these fields."

He paused and smiled gently at his friend. Francis paled a little, and breathed quickly, but could find no word to say.

"Do not pity me for feeling the approach of death," continued Dariza. "That which seems horrible to you, with youth and courage and love your servants, is a thing sweet to me. Death, I take it, is no more than a change of habitation and a widening of vision; a change from this narrow, grief-stricken house to a place where the eyes of love shall brighten, never again to dim with suffering; to a home that shelters no dread of disruption. There my dearest friend awaits me—the woman I love—in that bright house where neither pain nor misunderstanding may enter."

He leaned forward, his arms upon the table, and his bright, dark eyes holding the younger man's fascinated gaze.

"I do not speak as a poet or a

dreamer," he said, "but as a man who has lived and suffered, and taken joy of the world, and read men and books, and sifted the teachings of the churches, without fear or prejudice, as food for my needs. So I am ready to go joyfully—save for one fear—one regret."

Drurie tried to ask the question.

"It is this," went on Dariza. "My boy may still live, disgraced, suffering, and unbefriended."

There was such agony in the old man's eyes that Francis turned away.

"I have none of this fear at thought of leaving Isobel," said Dariza. "She is with relatives and friends, sheltered and loved. But my boy! God, if it is that he lives, and is in need of trust and tenderness, and should come home some day and find me gone!"

"Do you think he may be—be alive?" asked Francis, scarce above a whisper. "If so, sir, how is it that he has not come home before this?" His voice grew surer. "In good fortune or evil, Dick Dariza will never lack a friend so long as I draw breath."

"Noble heart," said the old man. He extended a thin hand, and clutched Drurie's wrist. "My heart aches with the doubt of his fate," he whispered. "How gladly should I welcome the sure news of his safety in death. If he lives, the life of the outcast is his. Dear God, why did I let him from my sight?"

He hid his face in his hands and wept silently. Francis, unspeakably embarrassed, did his best to comfort him. He laid a timid hand on the thin, quaking shoulders.

"Do not fret, sir," he murmured. "If Dick is dead you may be sure that he died like a gentleman, for all this talk of his crime of killing a superior. If he lives, then if ever I hear of him I shall find him, though the search lead me to the ends of the earth. And in whatever position I find him—high or low, rich or poor, in bondage or in power—I shall claim him as my friend, and serve him with all my heart and strength."

At last the stricken old man grew calm, and looked his young friend fairly in the face again.

"I had no right to show you my sorrow," he said. He gazed through the long windows and across the sunlit lawns

to the rounded woods of his brother-in-law's park. "For Isobel's future I do not worry," he said. "She is sheltered, and the world is on her side. Henry Fairwood will be her guardian when I am gone. He loves her as if she were his own daughter. But I do not think his guardianship will last long. That a younger man will soon take his charge from him I have not a doubt."

Young Drurie's blood drummed in his ears, and he felt his cheeks tingling. What was Dariza going to say, he wondered? A sweet hope flooded his brain and heart like music. But the old man did not look at him. Quite unconscious of the young man's emotion, he said:

"John is a good fellow. For myself I like men of a more adventurous spirit; but the other kind makes the more comfortable husband. Yes, John is a safe man; and if a young lady takes a fancy to him I consider it a safe fancy. If he does not catch my eye as some others do the fault is mine; for, a man of books and reveries myself, my taste is all for men of action. I saw a deal of sword-iron and smoke when I was a young man, and books have seemed a limp and sapless enterprise to me, in spite of my honest application to them. The reading of love-passages will never take the place of kissing; and even so, when I follow the turns and chances of armed conflict, up and down printed pages, some smoke from my own youth and a veil of blood of my own spilling crawl between my vision and the book. Then I see the truth—the worth of the reality and the worth of the shadow."

Francis murmured a polite assent to the old gentleman's words. Had they been spoken in Dutch he would have done the same, for not a phrase had he heard after the reference to John. So that was settled, was it? Isobel loved John! That explained her unusual quiet and her objection to being kissed.

CHAPTER IV.

AN OFFER OF EMPLOYMENT.

FRANCIS had not been home long when a letter arrived for the captain, from Bristol, in the care of Stephen Todd, master of the good ship

Merryweather. It was from a wealthy baronet, who had been a shipmate of the captain's in the old days; and the heart of it was the offer to Francis of a berth with an expedition bound for Hudson's Bay. It was quite evident that the captain had been corresponding with his old friend, and had not failed to state his younger son's qualifications for any adventurous work on sea or land.

The expedition was to sail from Bristol in May of the next year. It was a venture of the Royal Company of London and Bristol Adventurers, designed to establish a settlement in the wilderness of the far north and open up a trade in furs and precious metals with the natives of that little-known land. The French were already at work there, but all the world knew that it was English territory. The expedition would consist of four vessels at least, all armed like pirates, and each carrying two commanding officers—the military commander and the sailing-master, or navigator. Francis would be given the military command of one of the vessels.

The baronet went on to say that there was nothing unsound about the venture; that he himself had taken shares in it to the cost of five thousand pounds, and expected a return of at least fifty per cent profit. In all sincerity he advised his old brother-in-arms to invest at least a thousand in it. He would reserve shares to that amount, on the chance.

This letter put even the hunting in a second place with the people of the three estates. Francis accepted the offer upon the moment of hearing it, but his relatives and friends fell into argument, the smoke and dust of which did not settle for a month. When they talked to Francis one would think that their lives, not his life, were to be risked. When they spoke to the captain one would think that their money, not his, was to be cast upon the waters. By the way they talked it over among themselves one would think that some crime was contemplated by the captain and Francis.

Only Mr. Dariza and Joskins were in sympathy with the adventurers. Mr. Dariza explained, at great length, that an expedition of this kind was a greater thing than any crop of tobacco that had ever been raised and sold in Virginia.

"If our fathers had all sat at home," said he, "who would now be taking their ease in Admiral's Pride and Fairwood Manor?"

As for the old ex-gunner's-mate, Joskins, why, he was in two minds about whether or not he should join the expedition himself.

"I'd do it, beyond a doubt, if it wasn't that I be nigh onto seventy-five year old and so infernal totterish in the legs. Aye. Master Frank, there be no life in the whole wide world equal in sport and eddication to burnin' powder and makin' new landfalls. Ye'll be sightin' pirates and Frenchmen, I take it."

John's objections to his brother's joining the expedition were half-hearted; but his argument against the investment of a thousand pounds in the stock of the Royal Company of London and Bristol Adventurers was sincere enough, and became in time far too persistent to suit the captain. Master John was told to mind his own business.

At last it became an accepted fact that Francis should set sail for England in about seven months' time, with his father's investment in his pocket, and in Bristol take command of his ship and up-anchor for the desolate seas of the north. When every member of the household was convinced of this the captain said: "And now we'll hear no more about it at the dinner-table." So that was the end of it as a subject of general argument and ill nature. But in the quiet of her own room Mrs. Drurie was already knitting stockings of amazing thickness for her baby to wear in the chilly north.

Francis was overjoyed at the prospect of so good a berth with so enterprising an expedition. The love of the sea was in his blood; and, though he had won his spurs in the forests of the West, with inland planters and pioneer riflemen beside him and painted savages in front, it was his intention to win fame as a sea-fighter and to try his hand as soon as possible at a ship-load of Frenchmen.

He saw in this offer of the baronet's the initial step to a whole life full of adventure and glory. From distinguishing himself as the military commander of one of the company's ships, he would go on to a commission in the royal navy.

He had an idea that some day the picture of another admiral would hang in the dining-room of Admiral's Pride. But as surely as he was satisfied with his worldly prospects, just as surely was he dissatisfied with the present state and future promise of something that lay—though he would not admit it—still closer to his heart.

Mr. Dariza's plan for Isobel's future did not suit him at all. Isobel's attitude suited him still less. Before, ever since their very first meeting, she had always treated him as her dearest friend. He could find neither comfort nor reason in this transferring of affection from himself to his brother John. It was unjust. If he had been to Isobel's taste when she was seventeen years of age, why was he not still to her taste? In what way had he changed between his departure for the West and his return? What had he done to lose first place in her affections?

And what, in the name of all the devils, had John done to gain it? When Isobel's kisses had meant little to Francis, they had been his for the asking. Before that again, when they had been a decided embarrassment, he had not been able to avoid them. And now that he wanted to kiss her—when, to tell the truth, he could think of nothing that he wanted to do quite so much—she would not let him.

Laboring under the absurd belief that he knew the ways of women as well as he knew the science of savage warfare and the anatomy of a horse, he decided that Isobel Dariza was mercenary—and that her father was mercenary—and that all the blessings of life, save hard knocks, were reserved for elder sons. He came to this conclusion without heat, reasoning coolly, according to his knowledge of women and the world.

Isobel made two attempts to discuss the prospective voyage with Francis; but his reserve was such that she did not again refer to the subject until months afterward.

A small seaport town lay within ten miles of Admiral's Pride. There were coasting-schooners, flat-boats from up the river, and now and then a vessel from the deep sea. The whole town smacked of foreign lands and brisk adventure. There was a wharf, and there were old

sailors in their cottages and salty fellows drinking in the tavern. Here was the square in which the cargoes of Africans were sold to the planters, and here were long storehouses in which bales and hogsheads of tobacco were stowed, awaiting their places in the holds of east-bound ships.

To this place, as the winter progressed, Francis Drurie paid frequent visits, riding over on Jumper at the expense of good hunting. It was like standing on the threshold of a room in which he knew that he was soon to do great deeds; or, more aptly, on the porch of a vast house full of persons and chambers as yet unknown to him, yet among whom he was to make friends and foes and live out his life.

Some such thought came to Francis, and held his fancy. It amused him to consider the old, retired shell-backs in their cottages as actors who, no longer active enough to take their parts in the great "doings" within, had been firmly but kindly pushed from the bright and animated rooms to the shadowy porch. It seemed to him that they always sat with a sidewise tilt of the head, listening. And he knew that it was for some echo of old things that they listened, rather than for any voice from the dusky future.

He became a regular visitor at two or three of the cottages, cheering the old sailors' hearts and freeing their tongues and memories with good liquor and tobacco, and listening to valiant tales of the sea for hours on end. Also, he paid visits to the harbor-side tavern whenever a seagoing craft of any kind was in; and there he listened to the talk of active, though humble, players of the great game who had, as it were, but stepped out to the porch for a mouthful of fresh air.

One bright, keen morning in December, John and Francis rode together to King's Haven. Relations between these two had been somewhat strained ever since the first word of the Bristol expedition. Sharp things had been said by both; but John had uncovered a mean stripe in his character that was harder to forget than any number of angry words. Heir to a great estate, he had objected to the risking of a thousand pounds for the advancing of his brother's interests.

Of late he had begun to see what a

poor figure he had cut in that affair. It required no great power of imagination to know what Francis felt about it; so, for the past fortnight, John had been working hard to reestablish himself in his brother's good opinion. It was slow work, however; for Francis, hurt and depressed to a greater extent than he himself knew, over the affair about which he must keep silence, made no effort to forget or forgive the injustice of this other matter. True, the money was to be risked; but John's fault was the same, for all that.

During the ride the talk was half-hearted and scanty. Upon reaching the top of the hill overlooking the harbor, the brothers saw a small brig lying at the wharf. The common-room of the tavern was crowded with sailors, long-shoremen, and townsmen.

In the inner room, to which the gentlemen from Admiral's *Pride* were led, sat an old fellow with a head like a druid's and a body like a cask. His frosted beard lay like a cascade on his breast, and his mustaches flared from his cheeks like wings. His face was brown, his eyes were small, and gray as ice. He was dressed in weather-beaten blue, with sea-boots reaching half-way up his thighs. His right hand, clinched on the table beside his glass of hot rum, looked like the knob of some curious club.

"Good morning to you," said Francis pleasantly.

The old fellow stared offensively for a moment; then, without a word, he lifted the glass to his gusty mustache and drained it to the lump of sugar in the bottom. John flushed red with indignation.

Francis laughed good-naturedly.

"Your manners are not of the best, shipmaster," said he.

At that the mariner thumped on the table with his great fist and bellowed for the landlord to lay aft.

CHAPTER V.

A STRANGE LETTER.

MINE host opened the door and thrust his head cautiously around the edge of it.

"Brown," said Francis, "bring me a

fair-sized bowl, a bottle of Barbados rum, a pint of French brandy, a pint of sherry, red bitters, two lemons, four limes, spice, sugar, and boiling water. I am going to try my hand at mixing a 'Billy-rough-un' punch."

"Steady there, cook! Bring me another of these here buckets o' honest Jamaica stuff," roared the mariner.

"But I want you to try my punch," said Francis.

"The deuce take your punch," replied the mariner.

John was for leaving the room; but Francis gave him to understand that there was sport afoot, and coaxed him into a chair beside the hearth. He drew his own chair up to the table.

"I see that you are a regular old heart of oak," he said.

The mariner glared like a wild beast at bay.

"I am proud to meet such an honest, outspoken, rough-weather lump of a son of Neptune," continued Francis. "It is men like you who strike fear into the hearts of the Frenchmen, for they are polite people. You have no more manners than a hog, sir. That's the kind I like, for rough and dangerous work. You smell of rum and bilge-water. You fear nobody. You are the kind of man I like to think of as continually risking a deep-sea grave."

John sat very quiet in his chair. The mariner stared at Francis with more of amazement and less of sulkiness on his bewhiskered face. He had never been talked to like that before. What was the youngster driving at? He was grinning in very friendly fashion, anyway. The old fellow grunted uncertainly.

"That's better," said Francis. "I knew the moment I laid eyes on you that you were a sociable fellow at heart. Sociable, but reserved. That's the kind for my fancy. I love these bluff, gruff, ill-mannered old dogs that suspect every one who speaks to them politely of designs on their throats and purses. They are the men who make England's strength."

"Be ye drunk?" asked the mariner, with a dawning light of interest in his eyes.

"Most assuredly not. Do I look it?" returned Francis gravely. That was a

shot, right enough. He heard John chuckle.

"Oh, ye look right, aloft and alow! but ye may name me for a cobbler if ever I heard such fool talk afore in all my life," replied the other. He turned toward John. "Would ye say now that this young man be pokin' fun at me?" he asked.

Francis answered for himself.

"There was a deal of truth in what I said, and it was meant more seriously than it sounded," he said in a friendly voice and with an engaging smile.

"It sounded danged queer to me," grumbled the mariner.

"Well, however that may be, we'll shake hands on it," said Francis. Quick as the words, his hand was up in the air, close under the whiskers of the bewildered, sulky, half-awakened old salt. His bright, whimsical gaze shot a command into the depths of that clouded brain that could not be resisted. The old fellow glared and snorted with uncertainty for half a minute; then the big, gnarled, root-like paw opened, lifted from the table, and enclosed the hand of the young soldier.

At that moment Brown entered with the materials for the making of the punch. He gasped and gaped at the picture made by Master Francis Drurie and the unsavory mariner.

"Stir your stumps, cook!" growled the man of the sea.

The tavern-keeper recovered from his amazement and swiftly rid himself of his burden. He deposited bottles and bundles on the table, stood the kettle of boiling water on the hob, and finally placed a glass of rum and water at the mariner's elbow. It was a wonder how he had carried them all. The old fellow, instead of complimenting him on his dexterity, scowled furiously.

"Take it away," he shouted. "Can't ye see, ye fish-eyed son o' a swab, as how I be a goin' to join this gentleman in a glass o' decent licker?"

"But—" began Brown in a voice of righteous indignation. The mariner interrupted him with an oath and, snatching up the glass of rum and water with a swiftness of which one would not have thought the big fist capable, let it fly. Mr. Brown dodged. The glass and its

contents splintered and splashed against the wall. Mr. Brown slipped from the room without excusing himself.

Neither of the gentlemen made any comment on this remarkable exhibition of table-manners. The throwing about of dishes, liquors, and glassware was not entirely unknown even in the best-regulated households. But it seemed to be the last bubble of the old man's internal boiling. He leaned back in his chair and—*smiled*! Then, with eyes and ears alert and a benevolent relaxing of the jaws, he followed the mixing of the punch.

Francis made the punch, with constant hints from John. Neither were quite sure as to quantities, for Joskins had not yet taken them in hand; but, as they knew that they had not forgotten any of the materials, they hoped for the best. As the mixing progressed, the mariner's interest grew and grew.

"I never did see so many good lickers and fixin's go into one brew," said he.

Presently he began to sniff, and drew his chair closer to the bowl.

It was done. Three glasses were filled. Three glasses were raised and tasted. Never had a finer "Billy-rough-un" been brewed even by the hand of the ex-gunner's-mate. After the second round, John addressed himself to the shipmaster. He told him the history of the great punch.

The old fellow was impressed.

"An admiral," he said. "An admiral o' the navy. Well, I be danged! I were oncet in the navy meself—bosun's-mate. 'Twas in the navy I l'arned me manners. I's never forgot 'em, neither."

He told them many stories of his adventurous career, and all the details of his last voyage. His ship was the Golden Crown. He had sailed from London thirty-five days before. Yes, he had felt that it was his last voyage. The pumps had been kept working, day and night, from the tenth morning out until they got into the harbor.

The bowl was empty. As Francis shook hands with the master of the Golden Crown, he felt something like a folded paper pressed against his palm.

"Mum's the word, matey," whispered the salt, flashing his eyes at John's elegant back in the doorway. "Figger it

out on the quiet. It be a letter for ye, matey, as sure as if your name was writ all over it."

Francis nodded and slipped the thing craftily into his pocket.

"How long will you lie in King's Haven? I want to have another talk with you before you sail away," he said.

"I'll lay here till I calk me seams and overhaul me tops and get a cargo—aye, and drink another o' them broadside punches," replied the mariner, smiling like the best-natured soul in the world.

The punch had thawed John as well as the shipmaster. He was not accustomed to potations of such length and strength so early in the morning. No sooner were the two gentlemen in the saddle than John said:

"Frank, you have a way with you, and no mistake. That old rogue was no better than a pirate when we first set eyes on him, but he was mild as new butter when we left. I could never have dealt so with the old rascal. He'd have cracked my head for me at the first word. When you are sailing the seas, you'll have to play such tricks every day. You'll find these old pitch-eaters brisk lads to keep in hand."

Francis laughed.

"Oh, with that punch, one could come around the devil himself!" he said.

John laughed as if a very good joke had been cracked. His usual deportment was uncommonly sedate for one of his age; but now he rode high in his stirrups, bumping and swaying, and beaming to right and left.

"You'll make a great sailor, Frank," he cried. "I envy you your career, rip me if I don't! A man can win a fine name at that sort of work—and a fortune, too, like as not. It is not the highest type of mind, maybe—this galloping slashing, shooting, sailing type—but 'twill do, lad—'twill do. And you come honestly by it, Frank. There were a dozen of such among our ancestors. I am the first poet of the family. But it's little credit I get for that."

"But you say that Isobel likes your verses—so, why do you complain?" said Francis. You must not imagine from this that the punch had befuddled the soldier's wits at all.

"True—true," said John. "That is

something, to be sure. She has a very superior mind, has Isobel. She is a fine girl."

It came to Francis that he might just as well have the little pang over with now as later. He did not want people to think him a dog in the manger, as the saying is.

"Yes, she is a fine girl," he said. "If I were a poet, I'd put it stronger than that. And you are a lucky man, John."

He leaned sideways in his saddle and held out his hand to his brother. For the fraction of a second John looked surprised. Then, flushing a little, he extended his hand and pressed that of Francis swiftly and strongly.

John had accepted his congratulations! Well, there could be no question about it now. The most lively hope in the world could not keep a-wing against such odds. Francis's heart gave him a shrewd twinge, and then felt as empty and insecure as a bubble. It was worse than he had expected.

For a mile or so they rode along without a word. John did not feel comfortable. He knew that he had no right to accept his brother's congratulations; for, though Mr. Dariza had made no objections to his suit, Isobel had rejected him twice. He told himself that he would not purposely have deceived his brother. He had been taken unawares. Frank had made his little speech, and stuck out his hand so suddenly that he had not had time to think. And the punch had flustered him a trifle. In fact, it was all Frank's fault—he had made the punch.

But what did it matter, anyway? Isobel was sure to say "Yes" before long. Oh, there was not a doubt of it! She had not been able to give any reason for rejecting him. For that matter, what possible reason could she give? In spite of her superior mind, she was full of childish whims. Feeling sure of him, it flattered her pride to refuse him. John was full of such convincing arguments like these—but, for all that, he did not feel quite at his ease.

The uncomfortable silence soon wore itself out, and for the remainder of the journey the two brothers talked together in friendly vein of all manner of unimportant things.

When Francis reached home and the

quiet of his own room, he drew from his pocket the thing which the old ship-master had pressed so secretly into his palm. What joke was the fellow trying to play on him? he wondered. Here was a sheet of paper, folded and refolded and sealed with red wax. The outside was black with grime. Across it was written, with a blunt quill: "In hand of Master Joh Spark, of ye Golden Crown." Francis broke the wax and opened the sheet with infinite care. And this is what he read:

FRANK:

If ever you come to Bristol, haste to the Cat and Rat. You will find the master a small man with a bald head and a purple mark on his left cheek. Gain his eye; then knock thrice on the table with the knuckles of your right hand and four times with the knuckles of your left. He will then come to you and whisper, "Top-sil." You will reply, "Tagantsil."

Whereupon he will lead you aside and give you full information of me; and if I happen to be in England, he will tell you where to find me. He is my friend. I have talked of you to him a hundred times. Tell my father that I am alive and prospering, but not a word of this to any one else. I am not in need of money, but I am in great need to see you. Master Spark, who carries this, is a trusty man, but for fear that it may pass into the wrong hands, I must sign myself,

BADGER.

Francis read the strange letter twice before any light came to him. His mind and heart were all too busy with his own affairs. It was the word "Badger" that cleared his brain. That was what he and Isobel had called Dick, years ago, and for no reason that he could remember. Beyond a doubt his correspondent was none other than the vanished Richard Fairwood St. George Dariza, late of the king's navy—and now of the Cat and Rat.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BALL AT ADMIRAL'S PRIDE.

FRANCIS DRURIE was haunted, night after night, by the strange letter from young Dariza. He could understand the cautious style of it, for he knew that the poor fellow was in hiding from the law, charged with the

murder of a certain Captain Sir Howard Dilling. But what he was to gather from this rigmarole of knocks on the table and a friendly tavern-keeper with a bald head, he could not for the life of him think. In great need of something, but in no need of money. Now, what could he mean by that? Was he in danger of his life, from some other enemy than the law?

Before telling Mr. Dariza that he had received a message, he rode to King's Haven again. He found Job Spark in an agreeable mood. After ordering materials for the famous punch, they retired to the private parlor.

"Master Spark, I want you to tell me something about the man who sent that letter to me," said Francis.

"Put the question, Master Drurie, and maybe I'll answer ye," replied the mariner.

"Is he in trouble?"

This was evidently a hard shot for Master Spark. He pulled at his long mustaches, glared around the room, and wiped his brow with a huge mahogany hand.

"Well," he said, "ye might call it trouble—and, again, ye might not. He was safe enough when I left him."

"What work does he do? Is he following the sea?" asked Drurie.

"Aye, ye might call it that. He be's a fine sailor, be's Hodge."

"Hodge!" exclaimed the other unguardedly.

"Aye, that be your friend's name, I take it." The old man looked at the young man with a sort of taunting humor in his eyes.

Francis laughed. He read the old fellow like a book.

"You are sharp," he said. "But you are honest, and so am I. Hodge may be his name now; but, as you know as well as I do, he had another once. What that was I'll take it for granted that you know—and say no more about it."

Master Spark tried his best to look as if he knew a great deal more than he really did, and to hide his curiosity. All this was plain as print to Francis.

Spark nodded his head sagely.

"It do beat all," he said. "How has the mighty fell from his seat, as the sayin' is."

"It was no fault of our friend's," said Drurie. "He acted just as you or I would have acted in the same place. He was insulted by a rascal, and gave him the lie fair in his teeth. So he was asked to fight. It was as honest a fight as two men ever engaged in—a doctor, and seconds, and everything shipshape. Our friend was the better shot of the two, but the other man belonged to a more powerful family. So the poor fellow had to run for it, and change his name, and hide like a dog. We have thought him dead until now. But all this, of course, is old history to you."

"Aye, ye might well say so," replied the mariner. But it was not. He had known that the lad called Hodge was a gentleman, but had never been able to learn anything of his past. The old sailor's heart was warmed by Drurie's trust.

By this time the punch was ready.

"What manner of place is this 'Cat and Rat'?" asked Drurie.

"A tricky place," said the mariner. "Not just the place for gentlemen with rings on their fingers to fall asleep in. Aye, sir, ye may put it down as a chancey place—but don't ye name me for sayin' it. No harm in sayin' it, mind ye—but mun's the word, for all that."

"From this, I gather that our friend is in a rough and dangerous way of business," said Drurie inquiringly.

Spark leaned close to him.

"Ye have the right o' it," he whispered. "Rough and dangerous, ye may well say. If ye have any hold on him, sir, get him clear o' that crew. Not as how I mean to say any harm o' anybody—but a hint be as good as a handspike to a sharp one like ye."

Francis grasped his hand.

"Thank you for your frankness," he said. "Not a word of it shall go any further; but I shall not forget your hint or your kindness. I hope to make a voyage to Bristol in the spring."

Francis Drurie went over to Hopeland that evening, after his second talk with the master-of the Golden Crown. He had avoided the place of late. He found Isabel alone in the hall, seated beside a fire of hickory logs. He looked at her chin, and then at the top of her head, when they shook hands. He would not allow

himself the mournful pleasure of looking into her eyes. He was doing his best to forget about her eyes.

"You are ashamed of yourself—and well you need be," she said.

"Ashamed?" he repeated, honestly puzzled. His glance met hers.

"Why have you deserted us? It is five days since you were here," she said. Then she blushed suddenly and returned to her seat.

Francis felt that he was being made a fool of. She had counted the days since his last visit! What right had she to do that? And why did she blush? It did not look to him like a blush of guilt—which, of course, it should have been. What right had she to play with him after driving him away? He stared at her gravely until her eyelids drooped.

"You used to come to see me every day," she said gently.

"And now John comes every day. I thought that was enough," he said. There was a ring in his voice that he had not intended. She looked up quickly, and down again like a flash.

"You are rude," she said. "You must have lost your manners while fighting in the wilderness."

"I certainly lost something while I was away—something more important than my poor manners," replied Francis. Then, conscience-stricken at the speech—"I beg your pardon for speaking so," he said.

"What did you lose?" asked the girl without turning her head, and scarcely above a whisper.

The young man stared at her, astonished and angry. At that moment, to his great relief, Mr. Dariza entered the hall. He walked forward and met the old gentleman half-way.

"May I speak to you in private, sir?" he asked in a low voice.

Mr. Dariza glanced inquiringly in his daughter's direction, but she was gazing intently into the fire.

"Speak to me, Frank? Certainly, certainly. This way, if you please," he said in a very evident fluster.

Francis followed him to the library, puzzled at the uneasiness of his manner.

Mr. Dariza closed the library door, waved the visitor to a seat, and sank into one himself with the air of a man

spent with exhaustion. A red spot flamed in the center of each thin, yellow cheek, and his black eyes shone with a feverish brightness.

"You are ill, sir," cried Drurie anxiously, rising from his chair.

The master of Hopeland motioned him back.

"It is of the spirit, dear lad. Sit down, I beg of you," he said.

But Francis stepped closer.

"I have heard from overseas," he said. "I have heard, in a roundabout way, that one whom we love—and thought lost—is alive and prospering." He talked very fast, anxious to tell all—all that he could tell—without starting Dariza. "He is not in need of money. He is in the city of Bristol, very comfortable, but still in hiding. He is known by an assumed name; but, beyond a doubt, that old trouble will soon be forgotten, and then he will come home and live fearlessly. But, until then, he cannot be too careful. He wants nobody but you and me to know that he still lives."

Dariza looked dazed.

"Of whom are you talking?" he cried. "Do you speak of my son—of Dick?" He sat straight in his chair, only to sink weakly back again. His frail body shook as if with the palsy.

"Yes, Dick is alive and well," replied Francis. Then, hastening from the room, he returned in a moment with a glass of brandy and water. Mr. Dariza swallowed a little of it, and then pushed the glass away from him. He pulled himself forward in his chair.

"How did the letter come to you?" he asked faintly.

"By the hand of an old shipmaster named Spark," replied Drurie.

"Show it to me," said the other. "Let me read it, lad, with my own eyes."

Now, Francis had guarded against this by making a copy of the letter, for his own use in the future, and burning the original. What the old gentleman would have thought of the mention of the low tavern and the purple-marked keeper, he dared not contemplate. That he would have suspected the worst, and suffered more than at news of the lad's death, there could be no doubt.

"I burned the letter, for fear that a servant might get hold of it," said Francis, lying coolly in a good cause. "It is so evident that Dick wants to keep his existence a close secret that I dared not take the slightest risk of having the letter go astray."

Mr. Dariza gazed at the young man for a long time; but, as the other returned the gaze without so much as the flicker of an eyelash, he said at last:

"I believe you did right, Frank—whatever it was you feared. Perhaps you burned the letter for Dick's sake, and, again, it may have been for my sake."

"I burned it for all our sakes," replied Francis. "It contained minute directions for finding him in Bristol; and if these were to fall into untrustworthy hands—or unfriendly hands—he would be in constant danger of his life."

Mr. Dariza nodded reflectively. He had completely regained his composure.

"But what of the fellow who brought the letter across the sea? Was there not great risk in that?" he asked.

"The seal was unbroken. Spark is a rough but trusty man, I take it," answered Francis.

"I must talk to him," said Dariza. "I want to hear, from one who has seen it with his own eyes, that my boy is alive and happy."

"I have talked twice with Spark," said young Drurie; "and, though I do not doubt his trustworthiness, I know that Dick has not taken him into his entire confidence concerning his past and his family. Spark knows that Dick is a gentleman, and the victim of injustice—but nothing more."

"Once he learned that Dick is your son, the whole story would be his for the asking. Any one in King's Haven, where his vessel is lying, would give him all the particulars. And who can say what he would tell in his cups. If Dick himself has not trusted him with the secret of his past, what right have we to do so? And I am positive that Dick has not. The fellow is even ignorant of the fact that he was once an officer on a king's ship."

"I believe you are right again, Frank," replied Mr. Dariza. "But find out all you can, lad. I shall be at peace

with this world I am leaving if only I can feel assured that the boy is not in suffering and has a chance of attaining happiness."

"I questioned the mariner," said Francis. "Dick is not suffering. I am sure; and his identity is well hidden. In his letter he says he is in need of nothing save the sight of an old friend's face. If he is still in England, I shall see him in the spring. Spark tells me that he follows the sea for a living, and is a splendid sailor. I gathered that he sails only on short voyages, in small, coastwise vessels."

Mr. Dariza got up slowly from his chair and unlocked a drawer in his desk. From this he took a purse, which he handed, without opening, to Francis. It was a large purse, of stout leather, and full and heavy.

"Here are a hundred sovereigns," he said. "Please give it to the shipmaster as if a gift from yourself, and tell him that half of it is for himself and half for Dick. Dick may not be in need of money; but I think a little extra is always welcome to a young man, whether he be an officer on a ship of war or a common sailor on board a coasting vessel."

He sank into his chair and covered his eyes with his hands.

Francis Drurie soon made another journey to King's Haven. When he gave the fat purse to Master Spark, with a brief word as to how the contents were to be divided, the old man's eyes glistened with the unmistakable sheen of greed.

He opened it and peeped within. He pulled out a golden coin and pinched it between his teeth.

"How d'ye know, mate, but what I'll keep the whole hundred yellow boys for meself?" he asked with a leer.

Francis smiled.

"You cannot frighten me," he said. "I know you as if I had lived with you all my life. You are far more likely to give our friend the whole purseful than keep it all to yourself."

Master Spark look confused. He fortified himself with a glass of punch.

"Aye, mate, ye be in the right o' it there. Job Spark would never rob a

friend, even if he hadn't a single flat un to buy his grog with."

The weeks wore along; and the Golden Crown, tight and sound aloft and alow, and freighted with corn and tobacco, sailed away from King's Haven. The months wore along; and early in March invitations went out for a great ball at Admiral's Pride. This was to be in honor of Francis, who had made his plans to sail for Bristol some time about the middle of the month.

Since his visit to Hopeland to tell Mr. Dariza the news of his son, Francis had studiously avoided Isobel. He did not find this an easy thing to do. It went sorely against his inclination, and, which was worse, it caused comment on the part of Mr. Fairwood—open comment. But the poor lad could not trust his self-control. He knew that if the girl acted again as she had on that memorable day, he would cast to the winds all caution and the knowledge of the fact that she was betrothed to John. He saw his duty in the matter as plain as a pikestaff; and he would do it, though the heavens fell.

But Isobel's behavior caused him days of worry. He could think of no reason for it—and yet he knew, in the depths of his heart, that she would not act so for idle amusement. His heart cherished her image and defended her; but his brain told him that she was a flirt. He listened to his brain during the hours of daylight and to his heart at night. He often felt very much inclined to kick Master John.

The ball was to be held on the sixteenth day of the month. On the morning of the tenth the brig Thrush arrived in King's Haven. This was the vessel in which Francis was to make the voyage to Bristol. She was a full week earlier than expected; but, as the date of the ball could not be changed, her master grumblingly consented to wait until the seventeenth before heading eastward again. As soon as her cargo of mixed wares—silks, broadcloths, laces, firearms, wigs, small swords, and other fancy gear from England—was out of her hold, and the bales and hogsheads of tobacco under the hatches, Francis put his luggage aboard. He was keen to get to sea and begin his adventures.

Amid dangers and new scenes he would forget his worries.

The night of the ball arrived. The Bullers came all the way from Indian Creek, the ladies in an ark-like, springless coach drawn by four horses, and the gentlemen mounted. The Sprigs came from Sprig Towers, twenty-six miles away. Sir Peter Nash, though little better than a confirmed invalid, arrived in good time, with only one foot in a stirrup, the other bandaged to such a size that it would not go in the iron. There were dozens of other fashionables, from near and far—the Fairfaxes, the Darlings, the Plums, and so on, and so on. There were old, middle-aged and young; red and sallow, ugly, ordinary and beautiful; clever, common-sensed and stupid. But of all that were beautiful, Isobel Dariza was the most beautiful.

Every room of the ground floor of the great house hummed with the business of pleasure—the singing of the fiddles, the swish of gliding feet, the rippling of laughter, and the fine clash of silver and glass in the dining-room. About the kitchen and offices the negroes clustered. In the stables the horses of the guests munched contentedly.

Francis Drurie cautioned his heart not to be a fool, and asked Isobel Dariza to dance with him.

"You know that I cannot refuse you, in your father's house," she said.

He had nothing to say to that. He had a right to this dance, and he would have it. He had so few rights that he was determined to make the most of them. To-morrow he would be on the sea. To-night he would snatch what pleasure he could out of a very sad affair. Suddenly, in the midst of all that stir and light and merriment, it was as if they were the only real people in the world. She was very close to him. She looked up, fairly into his eyes.

"Why have you deserted me?" she asked.

There was neither coquetry or anger in her voice, nor any pretense of indifference.

"Because I cannot choose a middle course," he said quietly. He would tell the truth, since she had asked for it, and have done. "I must either love you or

keep away from you. I am a poor hand at play-acting. So, as you are to marry John, I have kept away from you. It has not been easy, I assure you."

"Why do you think I am to marry John?" she asked.

Her wonderful eyes were still raised to his, open and gleaming to their bright, dark depths.

"It was told to me; and John accepted my congratulations," he replied, his voice low-pitched and in splendid control.

"It is not true," she said with restraint that meant more than a passionate outbreak. "I shall never marry John. I have told him so many times."

"My faith!" exclaimed Francis softly.

Now they found themselves in a little room off the library, occupied by two old ladies and two old gentlemen, who were playing cards very intently. The only candles were on the center of the card-table; the corners of the room were left in shadow.

"It may be," whispered Francis huskily, "that you—that you care a little for some one else."

He could not hear her reply. He leaned closer, so that he could see her face.

"I have loved you—more than life itself—ever since I came home from the West," he said.

Again, he could not hear her reply. Her face, though very near, was turned away.

"Isobel!" he whispered.

At that she turned to him, and he saw that her wonderful eyes were gleaming with tears.

What marvel was this! And the card-players still gazed at their cards!

"You must not cry," he said tenderly. "I did not mean to hurt you. I shall go away to-morrow—and never trouble you again."

"Don't you know?" she whispered.

"Don't you see how I love you! I have loved you longer than you have loved me, dear."

He drew her to him, and touched his lips to her lips and eyes and brow. And the card-players did not look up from their cards!

(To be continued.)

THE FOLLY OF ANNE.

BY ELLEN FARLEY.

A SHORT STORY.



S Anne March turned to seat herself on the top step of the tightly shuttered house, she first saw the key, its bright, round top winking up at her like a friendly eye. Her misery-sodden mind regarded it indifferently. It belonged, probably, to the door behind her. But the house seemed deserted—closed for the summer. Then some one coming in or going out had dropped it—she would ring the bell and return it to the caretaker.

She pushed the button lightly at first, then vigorously, but no one appeared. The caretaker was away, she reflected, or perhaps there was none. Anne paused, dancing the key in her hand; then a mad idea flashed into her head.

"A key in time is worth nine," she murmured.

With a quick glance round, she fitted it into the tiny hole, and the boarded door swung out; a massive inner door of mahogany and silver likewise opened readily. She stood, breathing heavily, in the gloom of a wide hall filled with bulky, shrouded shapes. Only a moment she hesitated; then reckless daring superseded vague terror, and noiselessly she went up to the floor above. The first door she tried gave way at her touch, and she entered, closing it carefully and slipping the bolt. Making her way through the semigloom to a broad divan in the corner, she huddled herself up on it, her hands hugging her knees, listening fearfully.

"Well, what of it?" she addressed an invisible accuser. "I'm neither foolish nor afraid. My intentions are honest and honorable—unconnected with the family silver. I need shelter—I'm depriving no

one—and I stay, come what may, when or how, I care not."

Her head dropped back wearily; she settled herself more comfortably, and her hat slipped to the floor. An unutterable weariness of despair was upon her. She sighed again, pondered drearily, and so drifted into a deep, delicious sleep.

Velvet, inky blackness shut her in when at last she opened her eyes. She listened, after a prolonged stretching, for the raucous peal of the alarm-clock that would summon her to the steaming gridle-cakes in the dining-room—and then with a start she remembered the vast distance that lay between her and Taylorsville, with its neat cottages, the toy schoolhouse, and her pig-tailed pupils.

She rose, her arms thrust out gropingly, and advanced a few steps. Her fingers came in contact with something hard, big, rounding—the back of a chair. Another step—a little table tilted back a bit, then settled down with a jarring noise that seemed to reverberate in an endless void of darkness; then her fingers, fluttering over its surface, touched a tiny box.

"Matches!"

With a suppressed gurgle of delight, she lit a tiny candle on the desk and surveyed the room more carefully. Before the wardrobe, where a Japanese kimono dangled lonesomely, Anne hesitated.

"I believe I'd *rather* be hanged for a sheep than for a lamb," she decided, and, unhooking her waist, she slipped into the kimono's cool, silken voluminousness.

"My inner lady is clamoring," she reflected then. "I wonder if the caretaker has returned—or perhaps there isn't any—and there might be a stray cracker in the kitchen."

Blowing out the candle, but clutching

the matches, she slipped through the door.

"If I meet any one, I'll say—that—that I'm a kleptomaniac," she thought grimly.

Nevertheless, she walked softly—step, pause, step, her limbs dragging, hearing every second a voice thundering "Halt!" from the black depths—until at last she reached the kitchen, lighted her candle and placed it on the plain, scrubbed table. At the coating of dust her fingertips imprinted, her heart leaped joyfully.

"I don't believe there is a caretaker," she whispered.

Marooned on the empty shelves in the cupboard, a tin labeled "Sardines," a tall bottle of pickles and a glass jar of asparagus greeted her.

"Poor lonesome things—they're positively begging me to eat 'em. Oh-o-o, what was that?"

"Tap-tap-tap," sounded on the window-pane again. She could hear the rattling of the area door. Grabbing the candle, she rushed into the hall and started to mount the stairs. But suddenly she knew that she could not breathe in the night of the upper rooms with the knowledge that some one prowled below. She turned boldly to the door and drew back the heavy bolt.

A good-natured face under a blue helmet looked in, the suspicious eyes changing as they swept the kimono, the hair braided childishly over her shoulders, and the rose light filtering through the gold-filigreed candle-shade.

"I saw a light, miss, and I was wondering how it came there, knowing the family was away." His tone was almost apologetic.

"It's nice to know I'm so well protected," she said sweetly, biting her tongue to still her chattering teeth.

"Maybe, then, you're some relation," he suggested.

"Oh, certainly," she affirmed glibly. "I am Mrs. Burton, the married daughter, you know. I thought I could find where Miranda keeps her preserves—for a little midnight lunch. It *was* a bit creepy here alone—but now that I've seen you I shall feel perfectly safe."

She was closing the door, throwing a last smile through the chink.

"I'll take care no one disturbs you,"

he promised. "Good night, ma'am." And, swinging his stick, he departed.

"Now for pickles, asparagus, and sardines," she murmured, "and under the protection of the law, too. Oh, it doesn't pay to be respectable—and afraid—and stupid."

In searching for a can-opener, she discovered a package of wheat biscuits, and climbed the stairs boldly, gleefully hugging her prizes.

"I don't care—it's wrong and selfish and wicked to shut up a big house—good Heavens!"

Directly opposite a shaft of light fell through a partly opened door; at her exclamation a man straightened up from a suit-case, a silver-backed brush in his hand.

II.

"WHAT the deuce—" He checked himself, gazing at the girlish figure behind the pink glow of the candle open-mouthed.

Her fear-dilated eyes roved over the scattered clothes on the floor, the rifled, open drawers of the chiffonier, the dresser, and returned to his face, the significance of the confusion dawning slowly upon her.

"O-ho! there are two of us, aren't there?" she cried. She wavered slightly, and her laugh gurgled with hysterical shrillness.

"You had better sit down," said the man gravely.

Staring at the polished nails of the long, slim hand that pushed it forward, Anne dropped limply into the big leather chair.

"I hardly hoped to find any one at home," he explained politely.

"I—I—" she choked. A wave of defiance swallowed her fear. "I'm not at home."

"No?" He looked puzzled.

"I found a key on the door-step and came in," she said. "And then I was hungry."

He looked at the tins still clutched tightly in her arms. Taking them from her, he opened one and offered her a sardine-and-biscuit sandwich. In the big chair, with her braids over her shoulder, and her wide, questioning eyes, she looked like a child.

"Excuse me," said the burglar, disappearing for a moment and returning with a huge bottle.

"Apollinaris," he explained. "I ran across it in there," nodding vaguely.

He found a glass and filled it for her.

"Have some asparagus?" he asked, tearing the top off the glass jar.

In silence she dipped in with her fingers and sighed contentedly over the fat, succulent stems.

"Of course it can't be—it's a nasty dream—but it seems real," she said aloud, studying him fearfully. Then he looked up, his glance met hers, and she shrank back in affright. It *was* real—fantastically, horribly real—that she, Anne March, school-teacher of Taylorsville, clad in a kimono, was eating asparagus and sardines with a burglar in a deserted house in the middle of New York.

"Oh, I must go," she gasped, starting to rise.

The man put out a protesting hand.

"I am leaving in a moment," he said.

"Rather unfortunate our dates conflicted, eh? But I resign the field to you."

"You don't believe me, do you? Why should you, though?" she added bitterly. "I suppose the world owes you a living, too—and won't pay. And you decided to take it? Oh—I understand. We just have to live—being good is a matter of convenience, somehow. You don't split hairs when you're starving, do you? That's how I came here. But all I've taken is shelter—yet." She held up one slender hand. "It's like yours," she explained—"rather useless for real labor."

She felt that she was talking wildly, but the attentive eyes of the burglar seemed to urge her on, to invite confidence.

"Do you think I'd 'make good' in your — profession? I was penniless, homeless, and—incredibly reckless—but honest, until now. But do you know, I think I'd like to relieve the corrupt rich of their tainted money. I'm sure I could teach my conscience to be no trouble at all, in time."

She paused, breathless.

"Any woman can," he agreed. "But"—he smiled pleasantly—"despite appearances, I also am really an honest man—not even a kleptomaniac," he explained. "I live here—even when the

family are at home. It is my cousin's house, and I returned to-night from a month at Narragansett. I meant to go to a hotel, and then remembered some things I wanted here. Then you found me. I am sorry I disturbed you," he ended gravely. "Is there anything I can do for you before I go?"

"Oh, what an abandoned creature I must seem!" Her face was flaming now. "And I was rejoicing, glorying! I think you've startled me awake. I came in on a mad impulse; I'm sane now—and I'm going."

"Where?"

The word struck her chillingly, like a point of ice in her heart. She looked at him, her mouth trembling.

"That does not matter. Where do all the desperate, helpless creatures go? Oh, your monster of a town will swallow me quickly enough! If you knew how confidently I came—all loaded with precious manuscripts! Later I burned them to heat my canned soup, as long as I could buy canned soup."

"Ah! I wonder—now, if you were a stenographer—or a chauffeur—or a lady's-maid—but you write! Dear me! Oh, I say, how would you like to be a secretary?"

"Secretary—oh—but you do not know me! How could you trust me?" rushed to her lips.

"I believe you," he said gravely. "Besides, you're just the person Shales is looking for—you'll be a gift of Providence to him."

"It's impossible—a miracle," she murmured.

"But don't tell him about this weird adventure," he added. "Despite his wonderful brain and marvelous work, Shales is—conventional. You might say you heard of the job through a friend of Miss Gilkins—his last secretary, who recently married. I dare say you can furnish references from your old town."

"Oh, yes, yes."

He took an envelope from his pocket and wrote an address rapidly on the back, which he tore off and handed to her.

"You are very kind," she whispered. Joy at the wonder of this kindly Providence was mingled with a vague fear at its incredible strangeness.

"Good night," he said.

"Good night."

She stood rooted to the floor, staring, overwhelmed. Then with a little rush she stopped him in the doorway, thrusting out her hands timidly.

"Good night—and please believe—oh, I do thank you!"

His dark eyes held hers for a moment, sadness and laughter in their depths.

"Good night, little girl, and good luck," he returned, and slammed the door behind him.

III.

MRS. GORDON SHALES stretched herself luxuriously in her big chair, dropped the magazine she was reading to gaze dreamily into the red heart of the grate-fire. Through the sweeping rose brocade curtains was the glimmering vista of a white, whirling snow-storm, but she was seeing the long length of a deserted summer street, jagged shadows on the cobblestones, the round, winking eye of a key staring up at her from before a tightly boarded door. What a magic day that had been for her! How brilliantly her life had developed since!

"Anne—thou fool!" she murmured. Her slender fingers flipped the pages of the magazine restlessly, and a tiny frown trembled between her brows. Nowadays, in the lap of all the fat luxury that was hers, she found herself dwelling with recurrent thrills on the memory of that rash, mad escapade.

Strange she had never met the man since; nor gleaned a trace of him, despite her elaborately cautious inquiries. Day by day she had waited with the fluttering hope that he would walk into Shales's study in some unexpected moment. But he had never come.

Then, in the wonder of the name and position—and love—the great writer had offered her, the image of the other man had faded and she had forgotten. Yet, at opera and reception, she sometimes awoke to find herself looking for a sadly humorous mouth, for the black, questioning eyes that she would know among a million faces—

"Anne, my love!"

"Yes, Gordon—in my sitting-room," she directed sweetly.

Through the arched door beyond, a pale, stooped, partly bald man with mild, blue eyes and glasses came, carefully balancing a mass of photographs in one hand.

"I've been running through my desk, and I thought you might like to see the man your husband used to be—and the children," he smiled, tumbling the pictures on the little table at her elbow.

Absently Anne scanned a weazened baby in a voluminous christening-robe, a high-browed, serious child of four in kilts, and then—her eyes gleamed, but she dropped her long lashes as she held the photo out toward Shales.

"But this isn't you," she said.

"Hardly—even with my hair I was never an Adonis, I fear. He's a good-looking chap, eh? And clever—ah! That, my dear, is the picture of a gentlemanly and burglarious valet, who departed with an excellent collection of my studs, cuff-buttons, and scarf-pins a year or so ago. I found this some time after, and meant to turn it over to the police. Perhaps I'd better now—eh?"

"By all means," she said smoothly. She had turned back to the Shales of younger days. "Gordon, what a dear you were—and are!"

APRIL SONG.

THERE'S a faint pink flush on the peach-bough,
There's bronze on the tips of the pear.
And the willows kindle to orange
In the hush of the rather spring air.


There's a throb at the root of the crocus,
The spears of the daffodil start;
Freed from the winter's thraldom,
It is thus with thee, my heart!

Clinton Scollard.

RELEASED.

BY FRANK W. GURNEY.

A SHORT STORY.

RISONER No. 862 stood before the desk of the deputy warden. High above his head was the arched roof of the rotunda, from which the cells, tier above tier, radiated like spokes of a wheel.

Motionless he stood, his shoulders drooped, his pallid face expressionless. His suit of gray had been discarded for a blue serge of cheap material—a product of the prison shops which had absorbed the indescribable but unmistakable prison odor. The flannel shirt had been replaced by a coarse but warm sweater which came well up around his thin neck. The felt-sole slippers were left behind. His feet were shod in strong, heavy calf shoes.

A trusty passed directly behind the deputy warden, and from his lowered eyes shot a glance which No. 862 correctly interpreted as one of congratulation and farewell. For No. 862 was about to receive his discharge.

For twenty monotonous, lagging years had this barren citadel of stone and steel been his abiding-place. Day in, day out, year in, year out it had been the same routine, until it had become part of his very nature. His record had not been bad, as the behavior of "long-timers" averaged; nor had it been sufficiently good to earn for him the liberal deduction of sentence which the laws of the commonwealth provided for model prisoners.

He had tried to live up to the rules, but something within him had led him astray at intervals. What that something was he could not understand, much less explain. To the prison officials he had been a mystery. His first lapses had been attributed to cunning, yet there had never

been any ugliness in his actions or expression, but rather a listless disregard of regulations which earned for him uncomplaining days in solitary confinement.

The last time this had occurred was fourteen months before. The prisoners in No. 862's corridor had been lined up for the march to breakfast, when No. 862 deliberately left his place and started for the door near the head of the line. He was sharply ordered back, but continued at a moderate, shambling gait, as if oblivious of his surroundings.

Two guards, trained by years of experience, grappled and threw him to the floor. The other prisoners were ordered back to their cells, and No. 862 was led away to the dark room.

That night every prisoner and every cell in the corridor were searched, but nothing of a contraband nature was found. Latterly the guards had come to accept No. 862 as eccentric—"batty," they termed it; and while he was regularly disciplined for his subsequent slight infractions of the rules, he was no longer considered vicious or treacherous.

The ponderous deputy warden clumsily wielded the pen which was closing the twenty years' history of a human life. His movements would have been exasperatingly slow to one in whose veins red blood was flowing, but to the broken man standing before his desk they were merely an incident in the machinery which he had watched revolve with the same heavy motion for two decades.

At last the entry was completed and blotted, the book closed and shoved into place. The deputy warden extended his pudgy hand over the desk in the nearest approach to cordiality which he could assume.

"Good-by, Williams," he said. "Take care of yourself, and don't get back here. You're old enough to go straight the few years you've got left."

Williams hesitated, then slowly placed his limp hand in that of the deputy warden. He moistened his lips, and his face worked spasmodically, but no sound came from his throat.

Slowly, like one under the influence of an opiate, he turned his face toward the door which separated him from the freedom which had been denied for nearly half his lifetime. Even then he hesitated, as if expecting to be called to account by some one in authority.

There was no sound except the *scuff, scuff* of a trusty's felt soles as he passed through the rotunda. The press-button at the deputy warden's desk had summoned the doorkeeper from one of the long rows of offices beyond the double steel doors, and they had swung open, inviting Williams to the new world beyond.

As he passed the portals his heart seemed to rise and turn in his breast, and he caught a quick, sharp breath. It was the inborn fear of being called back, punished, and again made to face that uncompromising grind, but no hand stayed him. Vaguely he heard the doorkeeper's gruff but kindly words of farewell. They were a meaningless jumble of sound to his dulled comprehension.

Down the stone steps, along the short, tiled path, and he was on the sidewalk. His pace did not quicken, his head was not lifted. His eyes were downcast, and there was the same hunted, furtive look at passers-by which had been given him a few minutes before by the trusty in the rotunda, except that the trusty's glance had flashed a message as plainly read as if it had been graven on copperplate, whereas his own eyes reflected naught but the numbed blankness of his brain.

Avoiding the busier streets, he walked on at a listless, shambling gait, oblivious of the inquiring looks of curious people attracted by the spectacle of a broken man, though none could have explained why they gazed.

II.

It was mid-afternoon when he entered a small village. The changes which

twenty years had wrought in the thickly settled places through which he passed made them unfamiliar, but here everything appeared as he remembered it. This had been his birthplace—his home until the wildness within his soul, stirred to fury by evil associates, had led him through escapades, each more serious than its predecessor, to the culminating crime which had placed him behind prison bars.

As in a dream he turned down a rutted side street and into the yard of a small, old-fashioned house. Half way up the grass-grown path he stopped with a sharp intake of breath. For the first time since he had heard the doors of the prison clang their farewell his mind seemed to be reaching out, throbbingly endeavoring to comprehend.

Why should he go to this house? Only strangers were within. When he had last gone forth it was with the springy step of recklessness. The crime which was to be his undoing had been formulated, and every little detail carefully planned.

His mother, with that intuition which shields flesh and blood from impending danger, had seemed to read his secret, for she had placed her hand lovingly upon his shoulder as he was eating his supper, and had tremblingly besought him to stay at home.

And he—what had been his answer? He had shaken her hand off roughly, had cursed her and abruptly left the table, kicking over his chair by way of emphasis.

That was the last time he had seen her at home. During his detention, awaiting trial, she had come to him. He had been glad to see her for one reason only, and that was to get money with which to hire a lawyer to defend him. Uncomplainingly she had mortgaged the house, giving every penny that she might have him back. She knew his wildness. In her poor, sinking heart she feared the truth of the accusations against him; and yet, worthless outlaw though he might be, he was her boy.

Later, when he had begun his long term of imprisonment, she had again come to him, bringing such delicacies as the prison rules would permit, and even small sums of money, saved at the price

of the starvation of her emaciated little body.

His selfish, stunted brain did not tell him that she had aged with cruel rapidity since his disgrace. Even when she failed to appear on the regular monthly visitation day, and sent instead a brief, almost illegible note of cheer, every word of which had taken a drop of blood from her weak heart, he had mentally resented her neglect, and had written her a harsh letter of upbraiding.

And then they had told him that she was dead. His dogged stolidness kept back the tears, and his thoughts dwelt more bitterly upon the cessation of his creature comforts than upon the truth that he had killed her by his viciousness.

III.

EVEN now no moisture came to his eyes as he hesitated, staggered slightly, and then slowly retraced his steps to the roadway. The brain, which for twenty long years had been dormant while others did his thinking, could not seem to gather up the tattered ends and arrange them in sequence.

He had eaten nothing since early morning, yet he sought no food.

Listlessly, shamblingly, he turned back to the main street. He went on past the village store and post-office, under the arching elms with limbs bared by the early winter winds. He could not have told where he was going, or why, yet there was no hesitancy in his advance until he reached the village cemetery. He paused only for a moment, passed through the gate and down the winding driveway. His eyes, no longer downcast, were roving from headstone to headstone. In their depths shone, for the first time that day, expression—a look of combined eagerness and haunting fear. Down one path, up another, he went, but the name he looked for he did not find. He was certain that no stone had escaped him, yet

he started over again, traversing the same pathways, examining the same stones.

The cold gray of the day's close settled more thickly about him, and it was with difficulty that he deciphered the names on the marble slabs. His second quest was ended, and still he had not found the object of his search.

Suddenly something seemed to break within him. The fog raised from his brain, and he swayed unsteadily. Three or four stumbling steps were required before he regained his balance, and then came the tears, swift and blinding. A sob shook his frame, then another, and another. A few steps and his toe struck an almost obliterated mound. He did not seek to save himself, but fell at length on the dead, tufted grass.

"Mother," he wailed, "I want you."

IV.

It was the call of the child, cognizant of its puny weakness, seeking the loving arms which have always guarded it from harm. And then the sobbing ceased. A strange, unknown peace possessed him.

There they found him next day.

No one knew him; or, knowing him in other days, no one connected the body of that gray-haired, seamed-faced old man with the fiery, daredevil youth of twenty years ago. So the town furnished the cheap, pine coffin in which they placed him, and he was lowered without ceremony or song into a pauper's grave.

As the venerable town clerk made the entry in his record-book he glanced musingly at the preceding lines.

"Seventeen years sence we've had to bury a pauper," he commented to himself. "Yep, that's right," he added, as his begrimed forefinger traced the date line. "Let's see. Oh, yes, that was Hannah Williams. Hers was number fourteen. This unknown goes alongside her—number fifteen."

No. 862 had found his mother.

A TRUE MEMORIAL.

THE monuments of fame they raise to men,
Symbolic of the things that soon depart,
I would not ask; far better to have done
A kindly deed that lives in some one's heart.

Arthur Wallace Peach.

TWO MILLIONS AT LARGE.*

BY MARY C. FRANCIS,

Author of "A Son of Destiny," "Dalrymple," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

JOHN GARNETT, on his death-bed, gives Henry Wainwright a sealed envelope, and appoints him executor of his will. Two million dollars are left to Corinne St. John, studying music in Paris under the chaperonage of her aunt, Mrs. Clarkson; and two millions to Paul Hamilton, for whom Garnett has been searching twenty-five years. Garnett has always been desirous that these two should meet and marry each other for love. Wainwright commissions Nelson, of his firm, to unravel the mystery and find the missing man, and also to make himself generally useful to Corinne St. John on her return from Europe. Nelson is engaged to Marion Lambert, and, while lunching with her, meets Beverly Parker, who shows an active interest in the search for the missing heir.

Count von Baritz, who has been paying Marion marked attention, returns with her to New York. During a house-party at the Wainwrights, Corinne St. John's room is entered by a burglar, who steals her jewels and two thousand dollars in money, together with a photograph of Paul Hamilton, as a child, the most valuable bit of evidence possessed by the searchers.

CHAPTER VI.

NO CLUE.



IT was midnight when quiet was restored to the household. The men organized a searching party, and with torches and lanterns explored every inch of the grounds, but not so much as one trace of the thief was discovered. He had come and gone, with no sign of his unwelcome visit, save the successful taking of his booty.

The return of the men to the house was the signal for Mrs. Clarkson to renew her hysterics, and as she gave way to outbursts of fear, Wainwright sent for his own physician. Under the influence of an opiate the terrified woman sank into sleep. Very shortly after, the guests departed, with the exception of Beverly, who, at Nelson's request, remained to go back to town with him.

The count gave a parting shot, as he separated from his host. "It is most unfortunate. You have my sympathy. Of course it is strange that the little photograph is gone, but perhaps it does not mean anything. Good night. I hope when you find the thief it will not be the missing heir."

Nelson and Wainwright stared hard at each other as the lamps of the auto shot out their rays ahead of the fast disappearing car, and neither stirred for an instant.

Nelson recovered himself first. "Rot his nerve!" he muttered. "What do you think of that suggestion?"

Wainwright looked grave. "Stranger things have happened," he replied, "but we will have to get busy. Nelson, you call up all the morning papers, and place an advertisement, describing the missing things. And offer a reward of one thousand dollars for the return of the jewelry and the photo, or for the pawn-tickets, or information leading to their discovery. We are evidently doomed to a campaign of publicity. I'll talk to headquarters again and see what can be done toward keeping it quiet. Wait till I question the servants once more."

Fifteen minutes later he gave up inquiries as useless. When the butler left the library Wainwright turned with a faint sigh. A searching examination of every servant, separately, had revealed nothing. Each one had told a straightforward story, and not the faintest suspicion could be attached to any of them.

"It's an outside job," said Wainwright. "I'm satisfied of that, and I'm

* This story began in THE CAVALIER for March.

equally certain that no one in the house was implicated in it. Yet, I don't like the way it looks. It seems as if the thief knew just where to go, and had a reason for taking the photograph. There's something back of it."

"Miss St. John told me that the photograph had a diamond frame," said Beverly. "That would be reason enough for any burglar."

He turned to Corinne, who was very pale, but quiet and self-possessed again. "Didn't you say the picture was near the money?"

"Yes," she answered. "It was lying under the silver purse that had the four five hundred-dollar bills in it. He could have picked it up, scarcely knowing. What if we go out and look for it again? He may have dropped it somewhere in the grounds!"

"No, my dear," said Wainwright gently. "He didn't leave anything after he got it. I hope we'll get it back, but you stop worrying. Go into the music-room with Beverly, while Nelson and I do what we can about this."

In the beautiful gold-and-white room a soft light under delicate yellow silk shades glowed as mildly as moonlight. Beverly led the way to a deep *tête-à-tête*, and they sat down in silence. She leaned her head back with a gesture of fatigue, and he noticed how pale she had grown.

"You are ill," he said. "This excitement has been too much for you. Let me get you something."

He started to rise, but she put out her hand. "No, no, there is nothing the matter with me." She laughed nervously. "Auntie is glad the photograph is stolen. She said she hoped it would put a stop to the search for Paul Hamilton."

Beverly looked at her gravely. "Do you hope so?" he asked.

"I'm sure I don't know what I hope. It's so strange that I don't know what to think of the situation, anyhow. The search has begun in trouble, and something tells me it will go on in trouble. Wouldn't you hope for it to stop?"

"Not if I were Paul Hamilton." He leaned a little nearer to her, and added: "But not for the money. I would not change places with him at this moment for all his fortune."

In the silence that followed his words the faint splash of a little fountain in the alcove beyond the room fell musically.

Beverly's deep, soft tones went on: "You are too womanly to wed a title for the mere sake of it. You have enough money to make you comfortable, and you are young and beautiful. Do not let any false sentiment delude you into what may be a weary wait for this mythical heir. Be free. Make your own choice. Love some man for himself alone, and marry for love!"

His handsome face was close to hers. His magnetic voice, the voice that had charmed so many women, had sunk almost to a whisper; his eyes held hers with a compelling gaze. A warm wave swept over Corinne's face. Beverly changed his tone and spoke of their prospective duos together, and when Wainwright and Nelson came in they were chatting easily of art and music. Beverly said his good night last, and as he held her hand lightly added: "Don't forget our engagement."

"What engagement have you with Miss St. John?" asked Nelson, when they were fairly on the way to town.

"Oh, just to sing a little together," replied Beverly. The two were silent almost all the way. They both had much to think about.

CHAPTER VII.

TOGETHER AGAINST THE WORLD.

MRS. CLARKSON astonished everybody by a late appearance at breakfast, the next morning, and insisted on returning to town at once. Corinne was obliged to consent to satisfy her. Mrs. Wainwright, deeply chagrined over the outcome of her dinner, vainly attempted to console the excited woman, but all in vain.

"Do stay," she urged. "just for to-day, and get your nerves quieted down, and you will feel differently about it this evening. I promise you, we don't have a burglary every night."

"Oh, impossible! I haven't been so shocked since Fifi was run over in London, and nearly killed. I'm sure you don't mind, dear Mrs. Wainwright. Of course you're not to blame, but put your-

seen in my place and see how you would feel."

Despite herself, Corinne, stealing a quiet glance at their host, was forced to smile. Her aunt caught the smile, and Corinne hastened to the rescue—and made matters worse.

"Never mind me, auntie," she said. "Only it sounded as if a burglary were a dinner course. In fact, according to Margo, it must have been about simultaneous with the coffee."

"You have no nerves!" cried Mrs. Clarkson. "Actually, I don't believe you care! As for me I'm glad that horrid picture is gone, and I hope I'll never see it again. The count said so, too. You treated him shabbily at dinner. No wonder he devoted himself to Miss Lambert afterward, while you actually flirted with Mr. Parker."

Corinne's suddenly flushed face told of her embarrassment. Wainwright attempted to pour oil on the rough waters.

"Dear Mrs. Clarkson," he said, "don't be too hard on the young people. We were all young once. I had a temporary infatuation after I was engaged to my wife, and we had the most picturesque quarrel on record. Miss Lambert is a girl no man can resist, and Beverly Parker is one of Nelson's friends and one of the most popular men in town."

"He certainly is magnetic and agreeable," conceded the mollified lady. "Has he money?"

"Not that I know of, though he has a sufficient income and expectations from a rich uncle. At least I think it's an uncle."

"Oh, you never can tell about these rich relations. If he isn't sure of a fortune of his own, he'll be bound to marry money."

"Is he loaded down with an undesirable family, or is he free? Some men have a way of saddling all their family tree, root and branch, on a wife."

Nelson considered. "Well, I don't think he's overburdened with relatives," he said cautiously. "Whoever they are, they don't camp on him, and I don't think he'll hand them up to his wife."

"He spoke beautifully to me last night about himself," said Corinne. "He said that he was virtually alone in the world, and sometimes very lonely, and

then he spoke in the most ideal way about love and marriage. I'm sure, auntie, that he never would marry for money, for he advised me never to marry for anything but love, and—" She stopped, confused, realizing too late what she said. Warm, rosy waves lit up her cheeks.

"Oh-ho!" cried her aunt, with a cackling laugh. "Good advice from such a quarter can mean but one thing. Well, if you're not sensible enough to take the count, Mr. Parker might not be so bad."

"Corinne doesn't have to find a husband right away," said Mrs. Wainwright. "You can afford to wait a long time, my dear, and, for all any of us know, the missing heir may be as desirable a *parti* as one could find in a day's journey. Keep your heart free and hope for the best."

Corinne gave her a grateful look as they rose from the table, and slipped to her side while her aunt disappeared up the stairway.

"I do the best I can," she said, with a doleful grimace, "but, really, sometimes I think I'd marry anybody to get rid of auntie. She means well, but she never lets me have any peace, and I envy other girls who have homes and a mother."

Her voice shook a little with the last word, and Mrs. Wainwright drew her into her arms in a close embrace. "Dear child," she said tenderly. "I know just how alone in the world you feel. I have no children of my own, and I want you to feel that this is your home, and that you are to come here at any time and stay as long as you like, and bring all your grievances to us. Go back to town with your aunt now, and run out again as soon as you can."

She kissed her, and Corinne, with a grateful hug, said: "Oh, how lovely of you. I feel at home already."

The ride back to town in the beauty of a perfect day, with Wainwright diligently devoting himself to her, made Mrs. Clarkson almost reasonable, and she announced her intention of writing to various friends in London and Paris, and telling them of her marvelous escape from being murdered.

Corinne found the usual roses awaiting her that had marked the count's progress for several months past, and she

was scarcely settled to her morning mail when Marion Lambert was announced. In response to the message for her to come up Marion swept into the room in a smart tan gown that set her off to great advantage.

"You're a wonder!" she cried. "Here you are, fresh as a daisy—not so much as a hair turned! I'd be fit for a sanatorium if I had lost over two thousand dollars. It's awful to be so beggarly poor, and feel that you must skimp and economize. Really, you can't imagine the poverty-stricken things I do."

"I don't see any signs of it," laughed Corinne. "You manage to conceal your penniless condition admirably."

"Well, I've had enough experience. I phoned the Wainwrights just after you had left, and I've run in to say that you simply must join us at luncheon. Afterward we'll do something to wear away the afternoon. By 'us' I mean the Bud Stewarts, Beverly Parker, myself, and the count."

"The count!" echoed Corinne, showing her surprise inadvertently.

Marion laughed.

"Yes, my dear," she said. "You see, we came back in the same machine last night, and made an engagement to ride in the park, so we had a jolly little gallop soon after sunup this morning. You prefer him to send you roses, don't you? I have Nel send me violets. Another beastly economy, when I simply crave orchids, but Nel's so rotten poor. He isn't coming with us. Says he's too busy. I gave him a blowing up over the phone. He's getting too poky for any use."

A surprised exclamation escaped Corinne. "I thought he was anything but poky. He seems so much a man to me. He's so devoted to his father and mother, and Mrs. Wainwright tells me that he has supported them for years. I'm not sure but what I really admire him more than almost any man I have met lately."

"Oh!" Marion stared hard for an instant. "How sweet of you! I'll tell him the next time I see him. I was awfully afraid he bored you last evening, and I was really glad when Beverly Parker rescued you. He told Hope Huntley you were the most sensible girl he had ever met."

"Did he say that?" asked Corinne,

dimpling with the pleasure she was at no pains to conceal.

"Oh, yes." He has a way of saying that sort of thing. You'll understand when you know him better. He fairly deified Betty Lyon until she threw him over for Gus Spencer, with his six millions. You see, Beverly simply *has* to marry money."

"I don't believe it," began Corinne, when Margo entered with a box and a note, saying the messenger waited an answer.

"Pardon me," said Corinne, tearing the note open.

Marion's quick eye had already seen the writing, and she exclaimed: "From Beverly! and a five-pound box of bonbons!"

Corinne ran to her desk, her eyes sparkling and joyous excitement animating her face. "Yes, it is from him," she said, "asking me to be sure to be at the luncheon party, and I'm going." She hastily scribbled a few lines and gave the note to the maid, dismissing her. "Won't you have some of the candy?"

"No, dear. I never eat candy in the morning. It's so bad for the figure to munch at all hours. I must go and let you get dressed. Bud will call for you at one sharp. Don't be late."

They were a jolly and congenial party at lunch. Mrs. Stewart, with her vivacious blonde prettiness, well set off by a Paris frock, made what Gus Spencer was wont to call "a ripping good hostess," and the time slipped well along before they thought of getting up. The count fairly basked in Marion's smiles, and much of their talk was carried on in a confidential undertone. Beverly was oblivious to the whole world that lay outside of Corinne. Fortunately, her old acquaintance with the Stewarts did not exclude them from her circle.

Mrs. Stewart lowered her voice discreetly, after discovering that Marion and the count were unconscious of their existence, and said:

"Did you ever see anything like it? Marion certainly isn't behaving like an engaged girl."

"Who ever expected her to!" put in Bud. "She never behaved like any other girl, anyhow."

Beverly cast a significant look toward Corinne. "It's the title," he said briefly.

"Well, of all the fool things!" began Bud. "Fan, please stop kicking me! You aren't going to marry him, are you, Corinne? And if you're not, what do you care who does?"

"Miss Lambert may have Count von Baritz and welcome," said Corinne. "I wouldn't have him either with or without his title, and he must have sense enough to know it by this time. I told him plainly the last thing before we left the ship that he must curb that air of proprietorship that grated on me so in Paris. Actually, nearly all the people I knew thought I was engaged to him just on account of his manner. Look! He is doing the same thing to Miss Lambert."

"Marion stands it nobly," said Bud. "She's used to that sort of thing. She has a way of making men throw themselves at her head."

"Mr. Warner doesn't," said Corinne quickly.

"You're right," said Beverly. "Nelson has never sacrificed quite to the taste of the goddess. She's insatiable in that line."

Corinne looked him squarely in the eye. "She told me that you had fairly worshipped Betty Lyon until she threw you over for a multimillionaire. Is that so?"

Fan Stewart caught her breath. Everybody knew that the Betty Lyon episode was a sore one with Beverly, but he did not waver.

"I am as devoted to Miss Lyon as ever," he said, "and we are the best of friends. She did quite right to accept a rich man instead of a poor devil like myself, who has absolutely nothing to offer a woman except a heart's devotion. I shall probably never marry at all, Miss St. John, on that account, but I regret that I am lowered in your eyes."

"You are not," said Corinne, a trace of feeling vibrating in her tone.

"Of course you're not," said Bud. "Have a drink, Beverly, and let's all go round to the automobile show. We're sitting up here like a string of Chinese idols. Say, Marion, come back to earth."

The count attached himself to Corinne and Fan Stewart as they went out, while Marion followed with Bud and Beverly.

"You may as well select your car this afternoon, and be done with it," Fan was saying. "You can't get along without one, and I'll help you pick it out. The new models are beauties. Don't get anything shoddy in a motor, my dear. It's bad form, and you'd never enjoy it in the world. Don't you think so, count?"

The count's upper lip contracted strongly under his thin mustache. His voice rasped a trifle as he replied: "Oh, by all means, a good one. I am sure you will never choose anything but the best, whether an auto or any other thing." He slanted a look down at Corinne.

"I'll try not to," she said. "At least not in anything that I buy."

The Stewarts were motor-mad, and Corinne was soon overwhelmed with a fluent gabble of technical points which she understood not at all, though her enthusiasm was fully roused by the gorgeous machines, whose rich fittings breathed of luxury in every detail. The count evidently attempted to appear interested, but his manner betrayed a certain absent-mindedness. Bud was urging the value of "a good racer" on her, and Fan was claiming her attention in behalf of maroon upholstery, when they ran into Betty Lyon and Gus Spencer.

"I just came in to look round," said Betty. "Gus is going to buy a new car, and I want something different from my old runabout. Styles change so from season to season, one can hardly keep up with them. You're getting a motor, of course, Miss St. John? You don't look a bit as if you had been through that awful experience last night. Gus saw Nelson for a few minutes, and he told him about it. I had a watch stolen once, and I wouldn't use it after we got it from the pawn-shop. It seemed so second-hand."

"That girl always talks as if the earth were a little footstool for her," said Marion, as Betty passed on, with audible and critical comments on the machines. "She could beggar a prince with her extravagance. I'm willing to bet she'll break Gus Spencer if she keeps on as she has started out."

"I've looked at these things till I'm dizzy," said Corinne, in an aside to Beverly, as they slowly pushed their way through the crowd, augmented in the late

afternoon by the fashionable contingent from which rose a shrill buzzing of voices in discussion that almost drowned the music of the orchestra. "I can't make up my mind about a car in this jam."

Beverly looked round. A little to one side, in an enclosure, a superb touring-car stood invitingly open, the lamps lit, as though for a run.

"Let us go in here and sit down," he said. "You can rest, and we will watch the show without being part of it."

He assisted her into the car, and they leaned back on the soft cushions. Corinne gave a sigh of relief.

"Oh, how nice!" she said.

He looked at her without a word. They were alone in a crowd, and he gave himself up to the pleasure of being near her, yet isolated from prying eyes and curious tongues. She relaxed in evident enjoyment, and scrutinized the passing throng with interest.

He took in with evident satisfaction every detail of her toilet, the masses of her beautiful hair, and noted, with the pleasure of a connoisseur, that no touch of art had been added to nature. He was deep in a consideration of her eyelashes, when she turned and spoke with enthusiasm.

"I'm so glad to be home again. After all, there is nothing like our own country and our own men. Auntie says I'm lacking in an appreciation of types, and perhaps I am, but just the same I believe that our American men are the finest in the world. Just look at them out there! Tall, handsome, well-built. The count says I'm not a bit cosmopolitan, and I'm not, am I?"

"No, and I'm glad of it. I don't want you any different from what you are. Looks are all, then?"

"You know I don't mean that. They're strong, manly—men who wouldn't stoop to do a mean thing, who are honorable in all things."

His silence surprised her, and the gay badinage on her lips was stayed by the pained look on his face. He spoke in a low, even tone: "Miss St. John, I have been set before you in such a bad light that I fear some unfavorable impression is left on your mind. Still, I believe you are too generous and too just to let your judgment be swayed by any idle gossip

you may hear. Nowadays, unless a man has a million or so, he isn't supposed to look at a woman, especially if she happens to have money. I am tired of fortune-hunters of both sexes, and in justice to yourself I tell you that if I permit myself the pleasure of friendship with you, the same malicious rumors will be set afloat."

Corinne's eyes widened in candid delight, and her low-breathed reply fell like music on Beverly's ears.

"I would not be so cruel. Let them say what they like. We are friends, and when I like any one, not all the gossip in the world could turn me against that one. I propose to have something to say about it myself."

The look which he gave her in return was one that had made more than one feminine heart throb quickly, for, even aside from his reputation as a worshipper at the shrine of wealth, it was said by some that not all the women he had courted had escaped with whole affections. Corinne, ingenuous as a child, experienced a new sensation in her innocent life as she encountered that gaze. In the safe retreat of the auto, virtually unnoticed by the gay throng, they seemed to be utterly alone.

He laid his hand over hers in a warm, firm clasp. "Thank you," he said. "You do not know how sweet that is to me. We are together against the world now."

The wave of romantic chivalry he infused into the simple words caught her up with it. "Yes," she replied, "we are against the world."

They were completely lost to everything about them, when a familiar voice came distinctly to their ears.

"We were all together not half an hour ago, when Mr. Parker went off with her. They cannot be far, unless they have run away. Ah!" It was the count who spoke, and his final exclamation came significantly, as he caught sight of the two in the car.

On either side were Marion and Nelson. Marion said lightly:

"Oh, what a pity to interrupt such a cozy flirtation!"

"We are not flirting," laughed Corinne, secure in her new-found world of romanticism.

"Indeed we're not," added Beverly. "We're in earnest. Run along and don't bother us."

"Sorry not to accommodate you," said Nelson, "but I've been hunting everywhere for you, Miss St. John. I have some good news. Guess what it is!"

"Oh! you have found the things! Where are they?" She flew out of the auto with the agility of a squirrel, and eagerly laid her hand on Nelson's arm.

"Wonderful!" he laughed. "I didn't suppose for a minute you'd think of it. We have found some of the things in a Sixth Avenue pawn-shop—the watch and three of the rings. The other ring and the photo are still missing. But you're glad the picture is gone, and one ring won't count. I identified these by the written description you gave Mr. Wainwright." He looked around. "I don't care to attract any attention here, but you can take a look at them and see if they're all right."

They closed in about him. Stooping in front of one of the lamps of the car, Nelson drew out a small package from his pocket and opened it. The rays of light glistened brightly from the diamonds and pearls. Corinne gave a low cry.

"Mine! Oh, how wonderful that you found them so soon! I can hardly believe it. How did you do it?"

"By making the quickest search on record. It's too long a story to tell here. We have a good description of the man who pawned them, and we have men on the scent. Beverly, where the deuce did you go this morning after I dropped you at your apartments? I tried to get you three times on the phone between ten and twelve, but your man said you had gone out at nine o'clock on business. I can't imagine you doing a strenuous stunt like that."

Beverly smiled. "Well it was out of the ordinary, but I had an unexpected message from a friend. Nelson, you're a wonder."

"I salute you," said the count, his stiff air irradiated with something like cordiality. "You have done a marvelous piece of work. Miss St. John, I congratulate you."

"So do I," said Marion, flushing darkly. "Let us get out of this dreadful

place. The noise and heat have made me ill. Positively, I shall faint if I don't get into the air. Where are the Stewarts? Everybody gets lost in this crush."

The little party started to move on, and Nelson, leaning toward Marion, said: "I'm sorry you feel so badly. Let us slip away from the rest."

To his astonishment she turned on him angrily. "You have neglected me all day, and I have made an engagement to dine with the count this evening. Why not devote yourself to Miss St. John, if you can get her away from Beverly Parker?"

"Marion!" he gasped.

For answer she addressed the count, who was a few steps ahead. Instantly he turned back to her.

Nelson took a long stride forward to Beverly and Corinne.

"I was just explaining to Miss St. John that I would be compelled to excuse myself," said Beverly. "I have an engagement for this evening."

"I'm sorry, old man," replied Nelson. "Miss St. John, I'm going to claim the honor of your company this evening. There are some matters I want to discuss with you."

CHAPTER VIII.

"THE WILL IS GONE."

TWO days later the coldness between Nelson and Marion had been somewhat smoothed over, though the apparent peace was only a thing of shreds and patches. He had had a long and serious talk with her, and had pointed out that her growing and unreasonable jealousy would, in the end, lead to a serious breach if persisted in.

Accustomed to plant her foot on the necks of men, Marion had always resented the quiet way with which he had avoided that process for himself. At the end of a thorough canvas of the situation she had lapsed into a very penitent mood, and they had their first amicable conversation for days.

"I wish you could join us to-night instead of rushing off over to Jersey on that tip you are following for the missing heir," she said. "Why not postpone it for another day?"

"I cannot. We got it through our head clerk, Lloyd, and it's a mystery from the start. A strange man, who refused to give his name, called at the office the other day, when both Wainwright and myself were out, and said that Mr. John Miller, of East Wexford, might be the man we wanted. He declined to stay and claim the reward he could get if his information proved correct, saying that he was well-to-do and did not need the money. He had seen the advertisement in the papers, and as his own money had come to him through just such friendly information from an entire stranger, he felt it his duty to pass it along."

"A philanthropist in disguise!" said Marion, shrugging her shoulders. "I hope that, as the count says, this atmosphere of mystery will be dissipated before the season is over. Poor man! The way Miss St. John is snubbing him is something dreadful!"

"The count is quite dissipated enough to keep up with the atmosphere," he said.

"Do you think so?" she asked.

They were in the drawing-room of Marion's home, and as he spoke they both rose. His arms were reaching out to her when the gold purse with which she had been toying fell to the floor. Its contents were scattered on the rug.

He stooped to gather up the coins and bills, and his eye fell on a small strip of paper that uncurled before him with all the intelligence of inanimate things bent on mischief.

His involuntary look revealed the few words it bore, and, before he could speak, Marion, with an exclamation of anger, snatched it from him. "How dare you read my private papers!" she cried.

"Marion," he said, and his voice sounded hard to himself. "what do you mean by lending money to the count? Two hundred dollars!"

"My money is my own, and I'll do what I please with it. It's a small matter, anyway. Merely a little advance to him for current expenses until his check comes from his mother in Berlin. I saw the letter myself."

"I'd like to see that letter. He either isn't on the level as far as his title goes, or he's playing a deep game of some kind. We're looking him up, and until we find

out about him I wish you would have only a formal acquaintance with him."

"Your dictatorial ways are intolerable!" she retorted. "You can never rule me! Never!"

He had picked up the loose money and placed it in the purse again, but the broken clasp would not fasten, and he held the purse out to her, saying: "Your purse needs a new clasp."

Without a word she threw out her right arm in a swift gesture, struck the purse from his hand, and with the echo of the silver clinking on the polished floor, she swept from the room.

Nelson walked into the hall, took his hat and went out quietly.

A tangle of work awaited him at the office, and he plunged into it with a will, and by unremitting diligence disposed of a mass of detail within the next two hours. A sudden pause in his activity, while Jimmy sorted out some papers, caused his mind to fly back to the scene with Marion, and he realized, with a sore heart, that it would not be possible for matters to continue thus between them much longer.

Her magnetic beauty had held him in thrall for some time, but his affections were deep and true, and in the din of an inner conflict, wherein he was conscious of a longing for peace, Corinne's sweet, trustful face rose persistently before him.

He was staring hard at the sky when Jimmy's voice came to him remotely:

"Mr. Wainwright wants to see you right away."

"All right," he said carelessly, without moving.

Why, he asked himself, must everything desirable be as far removed as the stars? A vague dissatisfaction with things in general rose in his brain like a mist. If he were only rich!

He would go in and see what Wainwright wanted, and if there were time, perhaps he could run up and find Corinne for a few minutes. As he passed the high desk of Lloyd something peculiar in his appearance struck him, and as he gave him a second look he saw that he was very pale, but he was absorbed in work over a ledger.

One glance at Wainwright as he entered the door startled him. He was sitting by his desk, his face white and set,

an orderly array of papers before him and an open box.

Nelson shut the door and crossed the room quickly. "What's the matter?" he asked.

Wainwright pointed to the open and empty box. "The Garrett will is gone," he said.

Nelson felt his mind go blank. Scarcely able to grasp the meaning of the words he looked from the lawyer to the box and back again without a word.

"The receipts are gone, too," pursued Wainwright, "gone since day before yesterday, when I examined them myself."

Nelson found his voice at last. "They must be somewhere! They've been misplaced. They can't be lost!"

Wainwright gave him a long look. "So I thought at first. I discovered the loss this morning, and have been looking for them all day. So has Lloyd, who had them in charge. They are not in this office."

"Lloyd! Lloyd! Do you think that he—why, as long as he's been with us—it's absurd. Besides, what object could he have?"

"The objective point is sometimes remote, especially in the law," replied Wainwright dryly. "I questioned him without mercy a while ago, but I'm going to call him in and you can go over the ground with him yourself, while I watch his manner." He pressed the bell.

"The sealed envelope!" cried Nelson. "Is that gone, too?"

"No; it's in my private safety-deposit vault. Come in, Lloyd."

Nelson squared himself toward the clerk, and his gaze was returned openly:

Lloyd was a man of medium height and build, with light gray eyes that slanted a little toward his nose. His thick brown hair was known to be his one pride. On the whole, he looked quite the average man, save that his chin sloped rather too much. Just now his face was pale with the unnatural pallor of mental excitement, and his mouth was drawn in a straight line. Yet he lifted his eyes firmly.

Nelson opened fire. "Lloyd, where are those papers?"

"I don't know."

"If you don't know, who does? They were in your care. You are responsible."

"I know I am. I know how it looks for me. They're gone, and I can't account for them. I know what you think."

"Lloyd, you know us. We are not jumping at conclusions. Tell me all you can remember. When did you see them last?"

"Day before yesterday, when Mr. Wainwright sent for them. You were not in the office. I brought them to him, and when he was done I took them back and filed them myself. I was the only person who touched them. I put them in the same place I always did. That was the last time I saw them. To-day when I lifted the box I noticed it was very light, but I didn't think anything of it until Mr. Wainwright opened it in my presence and found it empty. I was thunderstruck."

Tense, low-voiced, straightforward, he told the simple tale that meant so much to all. His manner was pathetic in its utter quiet, and he faced Nelson almost helplessly, as he added, "I know just how it looks."

"Never mind the looks, Lloyd," said Wainwright, not unkindly. "We're all interested in getting at the facts of the case. You were the last one out of the office night before last?"

"Yes, sir."

"And last night?"

"Yes; I always am."

"At any time, in any way, to the best of your knowledge, has any one ever had access to these papers who should not have seen them?"

"Not that I know of."

"Do you know any person, or persons, who would have a motive for obtaining them?"

"I do not."

There was silence. Wainwright made little marks on a scrap of paper before him, deep in thought. Nelson gazed at the empty box. Lloyd steadily watched them both.

"That will do," said Wainwright, without looking up. "Do not mention the matter in the outer office, or to a solitary person, in the office or out of it."

"Oh!" exclaimed Nelson as the door closed on Lloyd, "call him back, and ask him about the man who called the other day while we were out."

"I've done that already, but got no light. I expect something to come of your trip over to East Wexford to-night. In fact, I think matters will either be cleared up, or—" He paused and relapsed into deep reflection.

Nelson waited several minutes in vain, and then asked: "Or what?"

"Nelson," said Wainwright earnestly, "this is a serious matter, and there is a connecting link running through the theft of Corinne's money and jewels, the disappearance of these papers and the call of the unknown man. We're up against a plot of some kind, but what it is I frankly confess I don't see. We have now lost every bit of evidence that poor Garrett left with me—save the certified copy of the will, which is also in my private safety-deposit vault, and the sealed envelope, and Lloyd has never heard of either. He has been here for twelve years, and I've never doubted his honesty, but I am not satisfied with his replies and his attitude, and from the time he leaves the office this evening I have arranged for him to be so quietly watched that he will know nothing about it. Does Corinne know that you are taking the trip?"

"Yes. I told her, but of course we are not to let her know anything that has happened here?" Wainwright nodded. "It's an ugly tangle, but I don't see any way out of laying the missing papers at Lloyd's door—not that I see any motive."

"It's the motive we have to discover," said Wainwright. "In the absence of proof we must not assume anything. I don't want to frighten Lloyd, and at the same time I'll fix it so that he couldn't get away if he were to try. Keep your natural manner with him, and watch him closely. What are you going to do between now and train-time?"

"Well," replied Nelson slowly, "I thought I might run up to see Miss St. John for a few minutes."

Wainwright gave him a long look. "What for?"

Nelson felt himself change color. "Well, I just thought I'd drop in and chat on things in general. Perhaps she might furnish a clue of some kind," he finished lamely.

Wainwright tossed the scrap of paper on which he had been figuring into the

waste-basket, and laughed, a laugh that penetrated the door and caused Lloyd, with his senses strained to an acute point, to feel a brief reassurance.

"A clue!" he repeated. "You've furnished one sure clue, my boy. Eh?" His smile expanded as a conscious look spread over Nelson's face. "I never knew some signs to fail," he went on. "Never mind. I may seem cruel, but the fact is I want you to go over the Hartford case with me. If you are good, you may go to see Miss St. John to-morrow."

He rang, and Lloyd, deathly pale, appeared. "Bring me Hartford *ex*. Morrison. Poor devil!" he added to Nelson, as the door swung behind him, "he's scared almost to death. He forgot that it was up to Jimmy to answer the bell. A guilty conscience is an uneasy thing, Nelson."

CHAPTER IX.

ONE NIGHT'S ACHIEVEMENT.

A LIGHT rain was falling when Nelson stepped off the train at East Wexford, a small station in New Jersey. He was the only passenger to alight, and as he crossed the wet, slippery platform the change from the warm, bright interior of the train to the chill and dampness of the outside world in the gray of the twilight struck him unpleasantly.

Inside of the station was a close, stale odor. A solitary man sat reading a paper in the corner.

Nelson approached the agent at the window. "Can you direct me to the house of Mr. John Miller?" he asked.

The agent turned from the signal-lamp he was lighting, and looked at him curiously. "John Miller?" he repeated. "There ain't no John Miller lives in East Wexford. Do you mean the John Miller of Ten-Mile Farm?"

"Well, I suppose that must be the man. His post-office address is East Wexford. Is that an electric line out there?"

The agent picked up the lantern and started for the door. "Nix, and there ain't no way of getting there but walkin' "

"Hold on!" cried Nelson. "Wait a

minute. I'm here on important business, and I've got to see that man to-night, and take the twelve-thirty-seven back to New York. Isn't there a livery-stable here where I can hire a buggy?"

The agent pointed over his shoulder. "That's Jake Weston, over there. He's got a rig here, and he's waitin' for his wife's sister on that twelve-thirty-seven, because his mother-in-law's dead. Like as not you can hire his."

Nelson crossed the room to the man. "Sir, Mr. Weston, I believe! My name is Warner." He offered his card. "I must see John Miller on an urgent errand as soon as possible. Would you be so kind as to let me use your horse at any price you wish?"

The man looked indifferently over the top of his paper. "The hire's two dollars, but you can't have it. Sils Nickleby lost a horse a week ago by just such a slick customer as you."

Nelson drew out his pocketbook. "Mr. Weston, I don't want your horse and buggy, but if you'll tell me what you value them at I'll leave the full amount with you on deposit until my return for the twelve-thirty-seven train."

The farmer laid aside his paper and fumbled in his pocket. "All right," he said, producing a soiled black leather receptacle.

"And, by the way," pursued Nelson gently, "as I don't know whether you'll be here when I get back or not, of course you'll sign a receipt. How much is it?"

"One hundred and twenty-five dollars, and I don't care how funny you think it is."

Nelson counted out the bills. "Thank you," he said, "and will you tell me how to get to Ten-Mile Farm?" He went to the window, from which the agent was silently watching the deal. Taking a telegraph blank, he offered Weston his fountain pen. The man shook his head.

"No," he said, "them things won't never write for me." He wet a stubby lead-pencil in his mouth and, as he heavily traced his name on the receipt, explained:

"It's easy enough. Follow the road to the left of the station till it forks north and west, about eight miles from here, and take the west road. Two miles more'll get you there all right."

"Will you please sign as witness?" asked Nelson of the agent. "Much obliged. I'll see you both later."

He tucked the receipt away in his inner pocket and went out into the rain to a typical country outfit. The buggy had seen better days. The springs squeaked in the peculiar sing-song fashion produced by time and wear, and the horse, a lean, ancient animal, had deep-seated prejudices against exceeding the speed limit.

Nelson urged him to his best endeavors, then lapsed into thought, and the face that persistently appeared before his mind was that of Corinne. Despite himself he found that all his speculation hovered about the question as to what manner of man Paul Hamilton should prove to be when found, and whether Corinne would love and marry him. A hundred different solutions rose in his mind, and were quickly dismissed, one after another.

His reflections were cut short when he realized that he had reached the cross-roads. He turned the horse into the west fork and, striking a match, looked at his watch. To his satisfaction he found that they had made the distance sooner than he had anticipated, and he would have time to make his inquiries and get back to his hundred and twenty-five dollars and the twelve-thirty-seven.

There was not another house than this on the two-mile stretch, and its aspect was lonely and forbidding. It was a small, two-story frame house, of a dull and faded brown, set back from the road across a narrow yard. The gravel walk was bordered with larkspurs and petunias, drooping dejectedly in the rain.

Nelson hitched the horse to the paling fence, crossed the little porch and knocked on the door. Silence answered him, and not a gleam of light from the tightly closed windows showed a sign of life. He went to the rear, and, seeing a faint glow under a closely drawn curtain, he knocked again.

The door was cautiously opened by a middle-aged woman with a hard, thin face. Nelson made known his errand, and with evident reluctance she admitted him, saying: "He ain't been home for a long time, but you can come in." She led the way across the kitchen into the

sitting-room. "Father, here's a lawyer come from New York to find out about Paul."

An old man looked up from the depths of a great chair, covered with a nine-patch quilt.

On the floor was a rag carpet. An oil lamp with a paper shade sat on the turkey-red cover of the table, and on the top of the stove was a brick, in its nightly process of heating.

"I've got the rheumatiz bad," he said. "What is it you want?"

The woman pushed a chair for Nelson to the side of the table opposite the old man, and he sat down. She sat by the table facing the kitchen door, and taking up a blue woolen sock, began to knit. Nelson told why he had come, stating the case briefly but clearly.

When he had finished, the old man, who had not taken his deep, shrewd eyes from him, said: "That sounds mighty fine, but you've taken a trip for nothing."

"How's that?" asked Nelson.

"This here Paul Hamilton that you're lookin' for is my nephew, the son of my dead sister, and there ain't no mystery about him. He ain't the man you want."

"And your sister—was her married name Hamilton?"

"No; Garland."

"Then how came his name to be Hamilton?"

"It ain't Hamilton any more'n yours is. His name's Bill Garland."

"Then why is he called Paul Hamilton?"

"He ain't called that around here," growled the old man. "He's plain Bill here, but some people call him by that highfalutin name because any fool can be called anything nowadays, and Bill went to New York and seen a play where the hero was called that, and he got stuck on it and got to calling himself that till he thinks it's his name."

"Have you a photograph of—of your nephew—say, when he was about a year old?"

"No."

Nelson considered for a moment. The old man continued to watch him closely, and the woman, though from time to time she forgot to knit, was plainly interested. In the silence the ticking of the clock was distinctly audible. A large

cat got up, yawned, stretched herself and lay on the other side.

"Mother," said the old man, "that brick's hot enough now."

She lifted it off with a corner of her apron and set it down near him, while Nelson, feeling as if he had been put back at least fifty years, wondered if he looked as blank as he felt.

"When your rheumatiz gets as bad as mine," said the old man encouragingly, "you'll find a hot brick's a good thing to take to bed with you. I can't stir a step."

"Too bad," replied Nelson, half absently. "So that is all you know?"

"Yes; that's all I know."

Nelson turned suddenly to the woman. "Mrs. Miller, do you know where Paul Hamilton is?"

The woman dropped her knitting. "Mercy, no!" she said, almost hysterically. She stared at him in silence.

Then the door between the kitchen and the sitting-room opened and a man stood on the threshold.

He gave a quick, comprehensive glance about, and in the suspicious gaze he shifted from himself to the other two Nelson could have sworn he saw a signal pass. He was dripping with rain, and the water from his hat made a ring on the oilcloth by the door. The woman jumped to her feet with a cry in which Nelson heard fear, but the old man spoke almost sternly:

"What's the matter, mother? Come in, Bill. This is Mr. Warner, a lawyer from New York, come to see if you ain't the man he's lookin' for to inherit two million dollars. I reckon you ain't the one, are you?"

The newcomer looked at Nelson half-threateningly, and without answering at once, walked to the stove, pushed the cat to one side with a muddy foot, and sat down.

"Not that I know of," he said. "Gosh, it's nice and warm in here! It's raining like time outside. Going back to New York to-night?"

"Yes, and I must be going soon. My horse is a borrowed one, and must be returned in time for the late train. In fact, I'm going now."

"Don't be in a hurry," replied the other. "Wait a few minutes till I get

some of this dampness drained off of me, and perhaps we can go together, if you've no objection. I've walked from Stonington, and I thought I'd find a horse out in the barn, but both of them's lame. I hope it's agreeable to you?" He nodded toward Nelson.

A danger warning ran through the young lawyer. There was no mistaking the type he had to deal with. His muscular, solid figure, the glint of his steel-gray eye, his defiant bearing, rendered him a self-invited guest whose suggestion could not be readily put aside. He tried in vain to conjure an excuse.

The woman spoke: "It's a bad night, Bill. Can't you stop here till morning?"

"I ain't got no time to loaf around. I got some business to see to in Trenton, and I got to be movin'."

"Yes, yes; of course. But you're so wet. You'll ketch cold if you wear them clothes. Better come into the front room and I'll give you some clean, dry ones."

Like a flash Nelson saw through the woman's ruse. The horse was hitched just outside the front door. He got up quickly.

"I left a little bottle of good stuff under the seat," he said. "I'll go out the front way and get it, and we'll have a drink before we start."

The woman had already opened the parlor-door.

"Come back!" yelled Bill.

Both men dashed across the little room and made for the front door. As they fled the woman shrieked at the top of her voice, and when they reached the outer door the brick, hurled by the old man with tremendous force, crashed against the wall within an inch of Nelson's head.

He burst the door open and rushed for the buggy, with his pursuer on his heels, uttering a stream of virulent profanity.

"Hang you!" he cried, as they struggled at the horse's head, "get out of my way!"

He thrust his right hand back, and as the raindrops glistened on the barrel of a pistol, Nelson managed to knock his arm up just in time to deflect the bullet that whistled close by his head.

Wasting no time in reply he tried to get into the buggy before the frightened

horse, plunging between the shafts, should break away. The two men were fighting at arm's length, exchanging blow for blow, when Nelson managed to land one on Bill's jaw that knocked him back against the fence. He sprang into the buggy; Bill gave a savage snort and, with a panther-like quickness, leaped forward. Before Nelson realized it, they were dashing down the road together as fast as the terrified horse could take them.

In their mad flight through the rain and darkness Nelson heard the thick, heavy breathing of the man beside him. The horse raced on madly, and as they tore along the highway Nelson wondered at the speed he had developed since he had driven him, less than two hours ago. His hope that something might intervene to cut their flight short was crushed by his companion.

"Smart trick you tried, but it didn't work. Try another one now, and I'll blow your brains out. I ain't goin' to New York, but you keep her movin', and I'll let you off in time to walk back. No nonsense. You know what this is." He pressed the end of the revolver against Nelson's temple. "It'll do the business next time."

Nelson made no reply. Nothing fitting occurred to him at the moment, and he was figuring that it was worth the one hundred and twenty-five to escape with a whole skin, when Bill spoke again:

"Just hand over whatever cash you happen to have about you, and I reckon you've got a watch."

The horse was no longer rushing with his first mad speed. They had now traveled over a mile, and Nelson, who had been raised among horses, knew that the animal was somewhat blown. His hope revived. He grasped the lines firmly in his left hand, and silently passed his watch, and pocketbook, containing over three hundred dollars, to his companion. The chill of the revolver warned him, but he had kept his head, and every sense was alert.

"We're pretty near to the cross-roads," said Bill, after a moment's silence, during which he had safely buttoned up Nelson's property, "and soon's we get there turn her into the north road and stop. You get out there. Understand?"

"Yes," replied Nelson laconically.

The horse, running easily now, covered the ground quickly to the parting of the roads, and Nelson reluctantly drew the rein to the right and they swung into the north road. Bill reached for the lines with his left hand, and Nelson felt as if his last moment of grace had come, when on his ears there fell the music of an automobile siren, waking the night with a shrill scream.

Down the long, rain-shrouded highway he saw the twin lights of a car looming dimly, as the machine raced toward them. His companion gave a yell of terror. The buggy lurched suddenly and the sudden motion caused the pistol to swerve. The shot that Bill fired missed Nelson and went wild.

Nelson raised his arm and struck the weapon from Bill's hand. As the shriek of the siren again sounded the two men once more fought for control. The lines were dropped as they grappled in the darkness. The frightened horse plunged forward. Then a flash of lightning showed Nelson Bill's face, convulsed with rage, close to his own. The next instant he felt himself hurled violently out of the vehicle and heard the horse gallop madly away in the storm.

The motor came tearing up at full speed, and Nelson, prone in the mud, yelled lustily for help. The car whirled so close to him that the rear wheels grazed his leg. Then came a crash, a grinding, tearing noise, the sound of flying stones, and Nelson, struggling to a sitting position, saw that the car had run into the angle of a low stone wall just ahead, and had been overturned.

Three men climbed from under it, and the chauffeur, thrown headlong in the road, groaned feebly as one of the men ran to him, inquiring if he were injured.

"Right the car, can't you?" cried another. "Or he'll get away."

(To be continued.)

He turned to Nelson and swung a bull's-eye lantern full in his face. Nelson recognized a deputy he knew well.

"Good heavens!" cried the officer, "what are you doing here, Mr. Warner?"

"Helping escaped criminals," replied Nelson grimly. "I look the part, don't I? I thought so much of him that I gave him all the money I had. Have you got a drop of something with you?"

He swayed as he spoke, a sudden faintness from Bill's last blow overcoming him.

"You're hurt!" said Sheehan. "Here, take a drop of this." He held a flask to his lips.

"I'm all right," said Nelson faintly. "Can we get out of this?"

"Not right away," said one of the men, coming up. "Brady says the driving-chain is broken, and it will take him about an hour to fix it."

"It's a nice mess," said Sheehan candidly. "Do you know who you have been up against? In all probability, Bill Garland, alias Paul Hamilton, alias Bug Deegan, head of a gang of all-round thugs we've been trying to round up for two weeks."

"I guess you're right," replied Nelson. "Hallo! What's this?"

He stooped and picked from the road a small blue envelope, opened it, and gave a cry that brought all three of the officers to him.

"It's a good night's work for me just the same!" he cried. "This pawn-ticket calls for the missing pearl and diamond ring of Miss St. John at the same pawn-shop where we got the others. Can't we do something to get that infernal whiz-wagon fixed up to get back to the station? I've got to make that twelve-thirty-seven and be in New York before daylight."

REMEMBRANCE.

THEY say that you no longer are with men,
That you have crossed life's dim, unsounding sea,
Yet in the quiet hours of the night,
And in the busy day, you walk with me.

Wallace Arthur.

THE FANTOM DIVER.

BY GEORGE WARBURTON LEWIS.

A SHORT STORY.

BIG Harkinson stepped off the raft and disappeared downward. The gray-green water lapped above his head, a few blister-like bubbles danced and exploded in the tiny swirl that marked his exit. That was all. The sepulchered Helena was about to receive a second visitor from the land of the living. The slender conduit that linked the diver with life paid out rapidly, then suddenly stopped, and we knew that Harkinson was aboard the wreck.

"Seventy-one feet," drawled Garrick. "A little pale, wasn't he?" queried Wenry, keeping a watchful eye on the line.

Garrick looked over to the speaker as though he had expected the question.

"What d'you s'pose is wrong?" he said. The faintest trace of anxiety was in his great, slow voice.

"It's Connors—I mean the mysterious way Connors's air-tube parted," returned Wenry. "I don't believe in spooks, 'specially submarine ones; but there ain't no more cause for the Atlantic cable coming in two at this minute than there was for poor Connors's hose—a brand-new one, too, mind you—separatin' as it did. It's queer."

Garrick, listening, spat reflectively at the last remaining bubble. Watching from my seat in the dingey, I knew that the two men, whatever denials they might make, were at last impressed with the gruesomeness of their chosen profession—dallying with dead things under the sea. Mayhap it was because Connors had been their tutor, their companion. Indeed, the old diver had been pretty nearly everything to them; but he had been even more to his employers. In his

unaccountable death the world had lost a master-diver, and the company had lost money. But because John Connors had been a faithful servant, the company had paid hard money that the old diver's harness-weighted remains might be the first brought up.

Harkinson's signal "up" was of that nervous, hurry-up sort that tells of sudden distress. He had been down but three minutes. At a similar depth he usually remained thirty or more, for he was a Hercules, and for him water-pressure had no terrors. I knew that Wenry, at least—though for no good reason—fully expected to see the big diver come up limp and dead. I read his white face like print. But when big Harkinson's helmet bobbed out of water a moment later, both his big red hands were clutching at the raft as frantically as if some pursuing monster were about to drag him down to death.

When his helmet was off, his face showed mottled and chalky. He spluttered out meaningless fragments of speech, and his eyes were fixed in a terrified stare. Garrick forced half a pint of whisky down his throat before anything like coherency could be restored.

"*He's down there—boys—Connors!*" The diver clapped his hands over his eyes as if to shut out some hideous recurring vision. "Oh, Lord!" he wailed, "think—think of him down there—walking around in the harness—Connors, dead sixty—sixty hours—walking and beckoning—"

Harkinson's great strength snapped like a reed under the strain, and he dropped forward upon his face, unconscious.

When Garrick consented to go down to the Helena, I knew that it was because

he needed money—needed it badly. Garrick, unavoidably, had long been idle; besides, he was engaged, and the girl was pretty and worthy; and the big, slow-spoken diver knew that he must prepare a suitable home for her. He was of a good, honest sort, was Garrick, and courageous, too. But I had watched his face as Harkinson, his nerves shattered, related from a sick-bed his uncanny experience aboard the sunken Helena; and thus I had come to know that, badly as Garrick needed money, he needed courage more, if he would succeed where Harkinson had failed. The thing was on his nerves, right enough; but I saw the grip of his big jaw, and I knew that he was indeed going down, even though he might not come up.

"There was a lot of wreckage piled up about the cabin-door," Harkinson had told us, "and I had to squat as low as I could to pass under it. As I raised up, inside the cabin—*Connors—dead sixty hours*—got up off a bench fixed to the opposite wall of the cabin, and came to meet me. *Seventy-one feet under the sea with a ghost!* Connors—yes, it was him, all right—suddenly stopped and threw up his hands as though recognition of me startled him. He wore his same diver's outfit—the kind we all use. After a moment his arms fell limply by his sides; but immediately he made a hand and passed it over his brow perplexedly. Then he seemed to gesture to me; and I found that I was also beckoning to him, signaling to him to follow me up. But he backed away in a manner almost of despair, I thought, and resumed his bench at the farther side of the cabin as I bent low under the wreckage at the door and backed out on deck, signaling to be pulled up."

11.

WENRY'S face was chalk-white, as big Garrick went over the side and dropped out of sight in the green swell that rocked our raft and dingey. As for me, I confess my nerves were strangely shaken. But I was scarcely more than a green diver as yet, whereas Wenry thrilled his listeners—and himself—with well-told tales of raised treasures and strange submarine encounters in which, be it known, he spared himself little

of the commendation due such achievements.

Within twelve minutes after Garrick went down, the body of Connors had been recovered in a fair state of preservation. Harkinson, an old-timer, too, had after all allowed himself to be frightened off the job by some fool, subaqueous phenomenon whose phases he had been studying all his precious life.

Wenry's superstitious mind was infinitely relieved. A semblance of color came back into his face, and I had begun to feel less of the anxiety experienced by one at work with a near-maniac for a companion, when all at once Garrick startled us with a fiercely tugged "up" signal. He was mumbling strange sounds before we got his helmet off, and when the light fell on his face it revealed a mask of terror unspeakable. His features were drawn and seamed unbelievably, and speech had deserted him altogether. Some awful emotion shook his great body like an aspen.

It was two long hours before we knew his story. All that Harkinson had seen in the Helena's cabin, Garrick, too, had beheld—the same in all its blood-chilling details.

The affair began to nag my nerves with a vengeance. I would have staked my very existence on the grip of Garrick's big jaw. I almost wished that I had done so; for Wenry and I were the only available ones now, and I knew beforehand that Wenry, if detailed, would refuse to go down. It was a time when one must be a man or a mouse; when a white feather becomes a white flag, and a white flag means the surrendering of a career. I am a natural coward, but possess underlying qualities of resolution. I could live without this job, I thought; and, too, I, unlike Garrick, was blessed with no woman's love save a mother's; but her comforts were my pleasures, her self-denials my heartaches. I went down!

I went down—down, down, down until my cumbrous feet met the slimy, slanting deck of the ill-fated Helena. The water was as clear as might be at a like depth. Everywhere was a confusion of wreckage. It had been a smashing gale that wrought all this demolition. I made out the cabin, half-hidden under a tangled mass of wreck-

age, and worked my way to the débris-barred door. I avoided the keen edge of a long knife which some whim of the storm's fury had fixed firmly in a piece of broken mast. The edge turned outward, menacing my lines, and I gasped. The mystery of Connors's death was laid bare. His hose had doubtless caught on the knife-blade; he had tried to haul it after him, and—!

I had to crouch low to pass under the barrier at the door. The cabin windows were clear, and in the ceiling was a huge, spar-torn hole which admitted light. I stood erect inside the cabin, and—! At the opposite side of the room a second diver in full dress had risen from a sitting posture, and now stood before me, motionless, but erect with the confident poise of life. A nervous, insane curiosity seized me; a yearning to know if the diver that faced me were of flesh and blood, or—or *something else*. I advanced toward the apparition; and then my nerve all but broke, for *it* followed my example and came forward to meet me! I hesitated only for the space of a heart-beat; then

I threw myself forward wildly, hands clutching, but on the greasy, slime-coated floor my feet flew from under me with the effort, and I crashed down.

The fall dazed me. I only knew that my hands, in the instant of my falling, had slipped over a smooth, hard surface exactly where the apparition had stood. From the floor I strained my eyes upward. The strange diver had disappeared. I tottered to my feet; and then the desperation of fright sent my hand to my sheath-knife, for as I gained my feet the vanished figure again confronted me. I drove the knife with all my strength, for I knew that the mysterious diver was not Connors. The knife-point deflected and grazed an impenetrable, even surface, and the force of the blow carried me with a momentary shock against something that felt peculiarly like a sleek, enameled panel. My tense nerves went slack, and my knees swayed weakly from the sudden relaxation as the light of understanding broke upon my groping senses.

"The deuce!" I ejaculated in the close confinement of my helmet, "*a mirror!*"

A HOUSE DIVIDED.

BY DORA ECKL.

A SHORT STORY.



LENO is the ordinary tough town of about one hundred inhabitants, and twelve saloons and gambling-houses, all going full-blast, and all openly testifying against the casual surmise that Gleno's excuse for existence lies in the presence of redwood timber around its mountain-seat. It bids fair to sink into utter indistinguishability among the other towns of its ilk along the line.

Jans's sudden appearance there argued a desire for at least temporary oblivion; he promptly bought out the Tunnel Saloon, and gave rise to many unsatisfactory speculations among Gleno's first cit-

izens as to where he came from, and why he came. Some there were who hinted at Reno; others insisted that he hailed last from Goldfield, while even San Francisco had a share in the disputed honor. One thing was painfully self-evident—Jans's uncanny talent for manipulating the cards, and his rapid accumulation of Gleno wealth in consequence.

Another thing more obvious to feminine Gleno, perhaps, was the fact that Jans had a peculiar wife. No one can say that Gleno is overparticular as to social usages; but when you land there as a newcomer—and few enough such there are—the good women all don their bonnets, and call on you to see if you

brought a harmonium, or if you use crockery instead of tinware.

At such times it is only fair for you to tell your caller some of the hardships you have encountered during your life; whether your husband is good to you, or whether he has his regular spells, but is quite endurable between times. It was a matter of only one or two calls to determine that little Mrs. Jans evinced a certain embarrassment, and regarded all visitors with timid secretiveness. Outwardly she was commonplace enough, with the lines of experience around her kindly mouth, and her great black eyes fairly overflowing with warm-blooded sympathy. The more did her strange behavior cause comment.

Mrs. Thompson, for instance, promptly found her an object for suspicion. In a matter-of-fact way she mentioned it to Mrs. Thronik, a lady of superb generosity as to outline, and an overawing decision of manner.

"Prob'ly you're right, Mis' Thompson," nodded this oracle. "If she ain't got nothin' to hide, what's she so afeard to talk for? No, no, I allus says it: it ain't nachural for a woman to keep 'er mouth shet." Mrs. Thronik asserted it positively, a new truth handed out to the world from her store of vast experience. "I wouldn't be one mite surprised if Jans had to jump the State, or somethin'. Any kids?"

"Not that I heard tell of," answered Mrs. Thompson, "and she didn't bring none with 'er, that's sure."

"Well," said the other, in hopeful self-reliance, "I'm going to drop in on 'er to-morrow, an' I'll see what's doin'. Of course, we don't none of us want to meddle in no one's private affairs, but it's only right we should savvy what kind o' people is comin' here to settle."

Later, when society happened to be in full session, the Jans topic took on a few new phases.

"She's got a kid nine years old. She told me so yest'day. Goes to a convent up to Ogden. She says as how her an' Jans didn't think there'd be no decent school up here in Gleno. Kind o' stuck up, ain't they?" This from the grocery-store keeper's wife, who had a ten-year-old daughter herself, growing up in blissful ignorance of educational benefits.

"Them kind gener'lly ain't got nothin' to be stuck up about," remarked Mrs. Thronik, throwing her weight judiciously in the somewhat slender rocking-chair.

"I think it's kind o' nice for 'er to take so much trouble 'bout the kid's schoolin'," spoke up Mrs. Thompson unexpectedly. "An' it's a fact there ain't no school here 't all, jus' now."

'There was a suggestion of protection in Mrs. Thompson's little speech, as if in atonement for her readily expressed doubts of a few weeks back.

"I'm thinkin' mebbe she's got good reason to keep the kid dark," piped a weazened, spiteful-looking woman. "There's all kinds o' people comin' to Gleno, ye know." And she snickered deprecatingly.

Mrs. Thompson, for some reason, flushed all over her hard, plain face. Mrs. Thronik turned heavily upon the speaker, and fixed her with a reproving glance for her tactlessness. The pause that followed was strained. It was Mrs. Thronik by natural choice who finally broke it.

"He's the best gambler in Reno. I heard that from somebody what knows. And," she continued with impressive indifference, "he don't touch a drop."

Animation increased to bald astonishment.

"Not a drop?"

"Not a drop. Never touches it in the saloon, and there ain't none in the house. I was goin' to show 'er how to make a brandy sauce, an' she says as she ain't got no liquor in the house, never kep' it."

"Funny thing, ain't it?" said the grocery-store lady.

"H'm. Then I bet he goes on reg'lar toots every once in so often. Them's worse'n if he tuk a little somethin' every day." So said Mrs. Raymond, whose husband made a practise of administering chastisement to his young wife whenever he "tuk a little somethin'."

Mrs. Thronik shrugged her shoulders. "Ain't been on a spell yet, an' they been 'ere two months," she observed.

About the beginning of July the nine-year-old daughter came home from the convent. Dorothy was a very red-haired child, with the usual lack of teeth in her front gums. She looked not the least

like Mr. Jans, and from her mother she had inherited only her dark eyes. Otherwise she was so bashful that she seldom did anything but grin when spoken to.

Mrs. Thronik beguiled her into her kitchen one morning, and in her loud-voiced, motherly way offered Dorothy any number of round sugary cookies. Dorothy munched industriously, meanwhile watching her benefactress black the stove.

"You like it here, Dor'thy?" queried good Mrs. Thronik.

"M'hm."

"Like it better up to Ogden?"

Dorothy wriggled bashfully on her chair, and kept silent.

"Think you like it better here?"

"No," came the answer.

"S'pose you been livin' longer up to Ogden. Know more children there. 'S that it?"

Mrs. Thronik turned and beamed as only one can who has an interest in childhood's joys and sorrows deeply planted in her breast. Dorothy ventured no reply. Mrs. Thronik hummed a little antiquated tune, and pulled off her gloves, her time-honored stove-blackening gloves.

"Want another cookie, Dor'thy? Jus' help you'self. I jus' make 'em for the children 'round here. Mr. Thronik don't care for 'em, an' I got dyspepsy so bad I can't hardly eat nothin' 't all."

Evidently Dorothy had no experience of dyspepsia to draw on, for she munched without comment. Mrs. Thronik resumed her humming.

"Ever live in Reno?" she asked suddenly. "Reno's a nice place. Ever been there?"

Dorothy sat up straighter, and fastened her eyes on the stove-pipe.

"We lived there a awful long time. I like it. I didn't want to go away. Pa made ma take me to a convent 'fore she left."

"Is that so? I bet you was glad to see yer pa an' ma again up here."

Dorothy stared at her for a moment, and then the love of enlightening one's fellow man overcame her natural shyness, and she burst out in one torrent:

"Oh, it wasn't this pa what made ma take me to a convent. This ain't my real pa, 't all; he's on'y the man ma got stuck on. My real pa's lots older, an' he an' ma ust to fight a lot. An' nen Alfred

come—he's my Gleno pa—an' ma kind o' tuk a shine to 'im, an' she went off. An' my other pa—the real one—tol' 'er she could go—" Dorothy giggled. "He said lots o' bad words 'cause he caught the whul bunch of us jus' when we was goin' to catch the train.

"Gee! The' was a big fight, an' pa was goin' to shoot Alfred, but ma wouldn't let 'im; an' nen pa jus' t'rew 'is pistol down, an' he says they wasn't worth the powder, an'—an'—nen he says some more bad words, an' he says ma could go any place she wanted with that peeled onion, an' she'd get all that she was lookin' for. That's what he says, honest, I'll cross my heart; an' nen he says she got to take the kid—that's me—to Saint Mary's, or he knew how to make it hot for 'em; an' so they took me to Saint Mary's, an' ma cried a lot, an' I cried a little, an' Alfred looked mad. An' he say bad words, too, an' he tol' ma to come along an' they'd fix it all up afterward, an'—an'—"

Dorothy stopped, slightly appalled by Mrs. Thronik's close attention. There ensued a pause, and then Dorothy gathered up the remaining cookies in her lap, and slid off the chair, red-faced and grinning.

"I guess I'd better go," she murmured. "Goo'-by."

Suddenly remembering her obligations she turned back.

"Thanks—for the cookies."

"Oh, that's all right," assured Mrs. Thronik, more loud-voiced than even the bashfulness of her little visitor called for.

When she returned from ushering out her guest her mouth was tightly closed, and her eyes were bright little high-lights behind her spectacles; her whole person vibrated with energy and importance. Deftly she placed a pot of potatoes on her newly blackened stove; with an air of methodical duty she hung her old gloves behind the door, and set the kitchen clock straight on the table. She divested herself of her blue-checked apron and, taking down a huge farmer hat from its hook near the provision cupboard, she rammed that decisively on her head. It was half-past eleven, no time for calling even in Gleno, but Mrs. Thronik had a righteous purpose in breaking the rules of etiquette. Deeply

imbued with that purpose she let herself out by the only door the house boasted, and trailed her skirt over the dry, dusty fox-tails to Mrs. Thompson's.

II.

"SAY, Alfred," began Mrs. Jans, about a week later.

Alfred was sitting at the table graced by its red table-cloth and smoky lamp. He was reading a San Francisco sporting sheet.

"Alfred, listen. You know those old buttinskis around here 'ave been tryin' to find somethin' to talk about?"

Alfred grunted.

"What'f they have?"

"Well," with a rising resentment. "what'f they have? It's none o' their business, that's what. Ever since we come they been pumpin' an' pumpin' to beat the Dutch. I won't stand for it."

Jans looked annoyed.

"They'll stop after a while. They talk such a lot that none of 'em know what to believe, so it's all safe."

There was little satisfaction if much philosophy in this view, and Mrs. Jans surrendered her claims to those of the sporting sheet.

But after she had put Dorothy to bed she came up behind Jans, and softly rested her cheek on his head as he sat still reading. The man turned, an easy tenderness in his touch as he drew her down on his lap.

"Been worryin', hain't ye?" he began, a little embarrassed at his show of affection. "Been worryin' your little fool head off 'cause some o' hens 'ave been jawin'. What they say?" humoring her.

"Seem's though they found out somethin'," she faltered. "An' seem's though they got hold o' some o' the facts."

The man had a weak face, though keen. Now, it wore an expression of helplessness. He patted her hand gently.

"Well, dearie, what's done's done. We're tryin' to fix it. Lord knows. Mebbe you kin get freed pretty soon now, an' then we'll go away for a spell; an' when we come back they kin talk all they want to." He gazed at the lamp-chimney as he spoke instead of at her.

"An' if I can't get the divorce?"

The helplessness on his face deepened

as she searched it for some anchor. Jans roused himself.

"If you can't? Dearie, you know how I care for you, don't you—don't you?" he urged. "That's all we need. There's never been another woman I thought so much of; an', so help me, I'll never care for another. You know that, don't you, dearie? Ain't I shown it to ye ever since—since—" He held her hands tighter as he spoke, and there was a ring of real conviction in his voice.

It was to such a slender thing that she had clung many times before; and now, too, her trouble gradually gave way; and as she lifted her candid eyes to his smooth, boyish face, he was agreeably certain of her belief in him.

"Anyway, Alfred," she said more cheerfully, "we got to get married an' settle the whole thing decent. That's sure. It's for Dorothy, honey. For myself"—and her eyes shone as if with pride—"for myself there'd be no two ways about it. I'd follow ye as long as ye'd let me. Yes, honest I would. But Dorothy, she can't grow up hearin' things about 'er mother an' findin' out they're true, an' all that. It's an awful thing for a girl."

"Dorothy ain't no slouch," returned Jans. "She's got 'er eyes open, an' she keeps 'er mouth shut. Don't you worry none about Dor'thy. You wouldn't leave me jus' 'count o' her, would ye?" he asked almost playfully; but her failure to respond gave life to a tiny spark of suspicion. "Would you?" he demanded more sharply.

"I don't know. Alfred," sighed the woman. "It ain't a easy thing to think of. If you really cared for me," she added, turning reproachfully to him, "you wouldn't ask me no question like that. You wouldn't want me to do nothin' but what's best. That's the way I'd feel about it."

But he was quite ready to dodge the issue by this time.

"Well, never mind, dearie," he said, kissing and biting her fingers. "We're makin' a lot o' trouble for ourself, worryin' 'bout somethin' that'll never happen, prob'ly. You'll get your divorce, an' then we'll fix it up so no old tabbies can get their mouth full."

When he prepared "to go over to the

shack jus' to see what's doin'," at about ten o'clock, he was care-free and whistling.

Dorothy finished her uneventful little vacation in Gleno and returned duly to Ogden. Her mother wanted to take her there, but Jans protested bitterly.

"She's a smart kid, an' she kin go alone jus' 's well 's not. I can't keep house while you're gone. We'll get somebody to look after 'er as far's Reno, an' the sisters'll meet 'er there."

And her mother instinct being sorely torn between these two children dependent upon her, the woman yielded to the more insistent demand and stayed in Gleno.

However, later in the winter, the time came when she had to go. All that had been troubling her was at stake in Reno. Jans revolted again, although he admitted the necessity this time. He had a childish dread of letting her out of his sight. Then he proposed going with her, but she downed that suggestion at one blow.

"It's my affair an' his," she told him quietly. "You're not needed, an' you'd better not be round."

He accepted that decision and helped her make ready.

III.

Snow was lying feet deep all over Gleno, except where necessity had prompted the tunneling of little paths, or where some stray team from "up beyond" had left deep furrows and hoof-marks in the road. The sky was a uniform listless gray, with no prospect of later sunshine.

The little narrow-gage railway starts in the morning whenever the engineer finishes breakfast, be that seven o'clock or ten. Mr. and Mrs. Jans arrived in the tiny waiting-room at seven-thirty, and sat busily talking. Mrs. Jans's eyes were sparkling with life as she gave parting directions or discussed the possibilities attending her trip. There was a hopeful tone between the two, although Jans's uneasy glances at the woman's face showed that his dread amounted to absolute fear when he contemplated her actual absence.

Much was left unsaid when the locomotive puffed out of its shed part-way

down the road and came clanging importantly toward the depot. Then there ensued the daily backing and bumping, shifting freight-cars off the siding, and shunting them back again; the little whistle raised its discordant pipe, the bell swayed viciously. Fat, pompous, and dictatorial, the station-master roared his commands and displeasure.

"Good-by, dearie; take care of yourself," begged Jans.

"Yes, yes, of course; an' don't forget what I told ye about that jelly. Mrs. Thompson'll look in on you once in a while. Oh, yes, I'll be all right! Don't catch cold, Alfred. Now, remember. An' Alfred"—she drew him farther down to her and looked at him hard—"Alfred," she said in a lowered voice, "remember what you promised me—not to touch it—never—not a drop."

Jans grew red and rose hastily.

"Oh, sure! That's all right, dearie; don't worry. I'll have to go now. Wire me from Reno, and come back's soon's you can. Good-by, good-by!"

The little train swayed and grunted while these two waved and smiled, and waved again, as long as the woman could keep the man's lonely figure in sight from her window. One or two railway men, who had come up on a flying trip of inspection, regarded the little woman in the plaid traveling-coat with curiosity; touching domestic scene did not come in their list of Gleno characteristics.

That midnight, when Jans finally came home, he stumbled over a chair as he clumsily lit the lamp; then he looked round. There was almost open animosity in the officious ticking of the alarm-clock. The lamp smoked more than usual, and the fire Mrs. Thompson had made was sick and cheerless. He was an alien in his own house; and outside, it was all still and lonely—infinately lonely.

Jans by no means acknowledged all this; in his own mind he was simply fired, and he missed "her." He fell to wondering what she was doing at that precise minute. Sleeping, of course. Well, at what hotel was she staying, where had she eaten dinner, how had she weathered her journey? He pictured to himself how unprotected and helpless she would feel without him.

The clock ticked with sardonic amusement. Unprotected—helpless! No, Jans had to admit reluctantly, that was a false picture. She had often been unprotected, but never had she been helpless. It was, indeed, her strength on which he leaned so confidently, only half aware that he was leaning; it was her indomitable will that kept him true to a rather rash promise—not to touch a drop.

With her it had been a matter of practical consideration when she had bound him to that. He gambled better when he was sober, and gambling was his trade. Of course he promised—every man does. But he had kept his promise; and how many men are there, thought Jans, who can boast of that? Jans felt distinctly noble when his musings led him to this point. He had kept his promise—not a drop had he touched; against all temptations—and to Jans in this mood the temptations acquired a prodigious power—he had kept his promise. Why, come to think of it, he hadn't had a drink for more than five months.

For a moment his thoughts ranged over into the possible result on his relations with her if he should fall from grace; she had an unexpected strain of fanaticism in her at times, he had discovered. But he veered comfortably aside before he had explored the subject to any unpleasant extent.

However, even self-approval is a very poor offset against loneliness, and Jans mourned pitifully around his house day by day. He felt her spirit in every inch of the little unpapered cabin, and yet he missed her presence; withal there was beginning to arise in him a strange uneasiness to which, even had it been definite enough for that, he would not have dared to give a name for his own peace's sake. And above and beyond everything else, there was his awful need of her. How he needed her!

Mrs. Thompson did look in on him occasionally. She built neat little fires; she prepared little suppers for him, and arranged them almost daintily on the bright red table-cloth.

Once, after about a week of Jan's unhappy bachelor life, Mrs. Thompson stepped over with something on her arm carefully tucked up in a napkin. She found Jans at home, reading the usual

sporting sheet. He greeted her with a wan smile, and attempted to thank her for all her little ministrations; but she warded him summarily off by asking him whether he had heard from his wife lately. At that Jans's spirit brightened, and, making a dive into his inside pocket, he brought out an envelope with stiff-looking writing on the face.

"Sure. Got a letter last night—been delayed by all this snow. Oh, yes, she's gettin' along fine. Sends 'er regards to you, too. Guess she'll be home soon now. Good thing," he added laughing. "If she'd stay away much longer I might begin to get lonesome." Which did not deceive Mrs. Thompson in the least; but she smiled pleasantly, and sent her regards in return.

"An' here's a cake for ye," she went on, setting the tucked-up object on the table, and removing the napkin.

"I was bakin' to-day, an' I thought you might kind o' like a taste."

Jans stared at the cake. It was beautiful in its frosted whiteness. Jans stared until the cake began to grow larger in his eyes, and the firm white outlines became blurred.

"It—she—" he began huskily.

But Mrs. Thompson broke in on him. "Yes, your wife give me the receipt. It's real good, I think, don't you? Well, I guess that's all, then. There's nothin' more I can do for ye, is there?" She carefully avoided looking at him as he stood, the picture of woe, before the white cake. "Might as well do it, now I'm over here. Hope you'll like the cake, Mr. Jans. I'll be back to-morrow some time. Good night. Oh, no, that's all right—I can find my way out. Good night. Don't forget to give my regards to your wife."

Jans closed the door and turned again to the cake. This was the last straw, this practical, homey reminder of her who used to bake that very same cake in this very same house only a week ago. And now, where was she—and would she ever come back? More definitely, more unendurably, recurred that unnamed doubt of her—a vague distrust of the future born of the knowledge of her false past. There was that cake, like a mocking keepsake left him from time gone forever. It broke down Jans's en-

forced hold on himself. The cake heard and saw strange things, and it was never eaten.

IV.

Two more days and the news went around Gleno that Jans was drinking, and drinking hard. It was curious to note the effect on the good people about. Mrs. Thronik was positive that Jans's wife had decided to leave him, and he had taken to drink as a natural consequence. Probably when Mrs. Jans—they still all called her that for convenience—had reached Reno, she had thought better of "going to ruin with that peeled onion"; probably her real husband had made a lot of money in the meantime.

Mrs. Thronik wanted, above all things, to be charitable in her thoughts toward the little woman. "Poor thing," she said, "we can't all be decent." But she sympathized loudly with forsaken Mr. Jans, and hoped the woman would find out the mischief she had done. Although you couldn't hardly blame her, either—a woman always had a kind of hankering after her lawful man, even if she did fall in love with somebody else now and then. Besides, money, she said impressively, could do anything.

Mrs. Raymond merely said, "I told you so." She had earned the right to say it. Others took sides, some calling Jans a brute and a beast for going on a booze the minute her back was turned, and he pretending to be so straight while she was there. The remainder blamed Mrs. Jans severely for leaving him at all, when she knew there was danger of his succumbing. All of them wondered how it would turn out.

Mrs. Thompson managed to keep her own counsel in the midst of these conjectures and opinions. Only when some one told her that "Jans's been hittin' the bottle for three days straight, now," did she say: "What'll the poor thing do when she gets back!" Meanwhile, she still went over to the Jans home to build fires and arrange suppers, but she always found the place exactly as she left it, and the bed was never slept in.

On the fourth day it was noised about that Jans was getting troublesome; on the fifth, that he had relapsed into a

stupor, from which he roused himself only to tilt his ever-ready flask. Gleno was fascinated by the generous recklessness of this tear.

On the night of the sixth day, Mrs. Jans returned. The little train had had hard work to make its way over the snowed-up road, and it was ten o'clock when it finally wheezed up to the Gleno station. There was no one there to meet her, and Mrs. Jans carried her suit-case unaided to her little home, only a few hundred feet distant.

The place was in total darkness, and she had to grope around for a match to light the lamp. On the table was a plate, a knife, a fork, a loaf of bread, some butter beside it, and a little platter of chipped beef. In the stove smoldered the remains of a fire, and in a pot she found some overboiled potatoes bursting through their skins in the discolored water.

Without looking farther, Mrs. Jans removed her hat and heaved a sigh, half relief, half regret: then she undid her manifold wraps. She replenished the fire, and stood over the stove a moment warming her hands. Her face was in shadow, but her attitude spoke a weariness without hope of rest. Presently she pulled a chair over to her and sat down, her feet on the fender, her eyes fixed on a little hole in the stove-cover through which she could see the dance of the yellow flame. The clock tick-tocked, with an odd little rasping flaw recurring at intervals; it captured her attention each time, alert as she was to details. Occasionally the winter wind whistled around the house corners.

Only as the fire died lower and lower did her energy awaken to any action, and then, finally, the ticking of the clock led her to wonder about the time. She rose, and for a moment pressed her fingers hard to her eyes and drew her hands down her face, slowly, with almost a hint of age in the simple gesture. Turning resolutely, she looked for the clock, and saw with a queer sensation of fear that it was nearly one in the morning. Alfred should be at home, she thought.

At that instant she began to hear a voice amid the howling of the wind. At first it was inarticulate, only occasional notes distinguishable; soon she made out

an attempt at singing, and she stopped to listen, one hand clenched on the table. As it grew clearer she could hear oaths coming in intervals when the original words were evidently forgotten.

When footfalls stumbled on the step, her figure stiffened; and yet she had known all along. The door was flung open, and an icy gust penetrated the room. A moment later a man lumbered across the threshold and shut the door behind him.

His hat was crushed and dirty, his clothes dilapidated; he himself seemed to have shrunk together inside of them. He blinked stupidly at the light; several times he sniffed and drew his sleeve across his face. Slowly detaching himself from the wall against which he was leaning, he lurched toward a chair by the table, and as he came into the circle of lamplight he saw the woman opposite him. His bloodshot eyes stared wider, his mouth twitched ineffectually, and he pawed the table with foolish, trembling hands.

"Hallo," he said in a high strain.

She did not answer, and her lips were set as a groove in a stone.

"Hallo," said the man once more, and laughed as he dropped into the chair. With the added feeling of security, he tried to straighten himself, and he fumbled with his tie, hanging loosely down his unbuttoned vest.

"Hallo. I say. Gla' t' see ye back." As though proud of his effort, he leered reassuringly over at her. He expected a response. It annoyed him, this silence—gave him a curious sense of impending catastrophe.

"Ha' a nice time?" he asked feebly.

It was hard to keep his head from rolling over sideways. Why wouldn't that fool woman answer? He glared at her.

"Hallo!" he shouted. Then he rose, painstakingly, from his chair, furious at her obstinacy.

"Di' ye hear me say hallo? Hallo, hallo!"

Wild with rage, he seized the platter of chipped beef.

"Curse ye, answer me!"

With all his drunken strength he hurled the platter at her, and then made for her, as if to follow up his missile. Down he went, with a crash and a few

more oaths. She grasped the lamp just in time to save it from falling with the table-cloth that he snatched in his fury.

V.

JANS was deathly sick; all Gleno knew that. And Jans's wife was nursing him with a devotion that was not merely assumed for spectators. In fact, she was so very untiring and uncomplaining that Gleno, slightly puzzled and sentimentally touched, suspended judgment until the Jans affairs should be normal again. In the meantime, Gleno besieged Mrs. Jans with honest proffers of help; some even showed a willingness to watch—and listen—at the bedside of the wildly raving man, although they knew well that she would never allow it.

Night and day she was there, soothing him in his worst deliriums and peering anxiously into his face during his stupors. And at all times there was unfaltering love in her eyes and the yearning mother-touch in her fingers.

There came the day when Jans awoke from it all. Sunshine was drifting through the winter-frosted glass, lighting up the familiar red table-cloth. He could see a strip of it through the bedroom door, and he had a feeling of content. A warm hand was holding his own, and there was safety in the clasp; he looked up and saw her face over him. He smiled into it with childlike pleasure. Then his sense gave another bound toward consciousness, and he lost the look of the contented child.

"Dearie, I've been—"

"Yes, Alfred, you've been sick."

"M'hm, I remember."

He waited, slowly collecting his thoughts. Suddenly one idea stood out sharply from the rest.

"I wasn't sick. I was drunk," he quavered. "I was drunk as a log, an' I struck ye. Ye can't tell me I didn't. I struck ye."

"Alfred, darling, don't talk; you'll make yourself sick again. Please, Alfred."

But her remonstrance only excited him the more. His veins stood out in his effort to speak when his voice failed.

"I was drunk. Lord, an' I struck ye. Dearie, tell me honest, now—did I hurt ye?"

The pitiful anxiety in his tone made her smile as she shook her head in the negative.

"Aw, ye're lyin' to me," he stumbled on in his passion of repentance. "An' you never said a word, an' you jus' nursed me an' did for me, an' I promised never to touch a drop. Let me alone, I tell ye. I will talk." He tried to raise himself on his elbow in spite of her entreaties to lie still. "I'm a low-down beast, an' I ain't fit for a woman like you to wipe 'er feet on me. What ye so good to me for?" he whimpered. "Why don't ye let me die like a dog?"

"Alfred, you're makin' me feel awful bad, honey," she broke in.

The man turned over and hid his face. When he looked at her again, his strength had returned and his voice was steady.

"What're ye goin' to do now?" he asked.

The question came unexpectedly, and caught her off-guard.

"I? What'm I goin' to do?" she stammered. "Why, I'm goin' to nurse ye till ye get well, Alfred."

"Yes, an' then what?" he pursued relentlessly, and his eyes would not waver from her face.

"Answer me, dearie—don't be afraid. I ain't fit for a woman like you to stay with me, anyhow."

He took her hands in his own, as though their positions were reversed now.

"Oh, Alfred," began the woman, "I'd rather you wouldn't 'ave asked me that jus' yet. This ain't the time for it. You'll get yourself all excited—an' there's time enough."

"Tell me."

"I can't stay with ye," she brought out, inarticulate as an actual groan.

He said nothing to break the silence, but his grasp loosened on her hands. Softly, insinuatingly, scarcely bidden, his gambler's instincts began to assert themselves. It was a game, and the stakes were high. At last he spoke.

"That's what I thought, dearie," he said quietly enough. "It serves me right. What happened down to Reno?"

A sob escaped her, despite her fight for control.

"Alfred," she cried. "I'm tryin' to do what's right. Don't make it hard for me."

"Won't ye tell me about it?" he begged. His sincerity was genuine as yet. "I—it's nearly killin' me."

She bent closely over him.

"I've thought it all out till my brain's sick," she said softly, as though to make it easier that way. "I couldn't get the—the divorce. I tried awful hard, an'—an'—I had a tough time of it there for a while. He—he—it couldn't be done 'thout my givin' up Dor'thy; an', Alfred, 't seem's though I couldn't do that, even for you. Understaud, Alfred?"

The man closed his eyes. He wanted to do the unselfish thing—he wanted to be square; but how could he give her up when he needed her so? Besides, the game was on now, and he had to play.

"Alfred, I love ye better'n ye'll ever know," went on the voice at his ear, and her breath caught as she said it. "An' if it was jus' myself, why, I'd let the whole outfit go to the deuce. But Dor'thy, she's my child, an' it wouldn't be right. I can't give 'er up, my own child. Don't ye see, Alfred? Don't ye see?"

He moved a trifle beneath her hand, but he made no reply; this was not his cue to speak.

"It's hard, Alfred, it's the hardest thing I ever done, an' seem's though I couldn't hardly do it, after all. But it's the right thing to do, ain't it? *You* see, it's the on'y thing to, don't ye?"

She was fighting her own soul with all that strength that had so often upheld his. He knew it—knew it with the gambler's intuition of his opponent's hand.

"Sure, I see that, dearie. You couldn't leave Dor'thy. When're ye goin'?" he sighed.

She took her sleeve between her teeth and tore at it.

"Soon's you get well, I guess."

When she had herself in hand again, she went on:

"At first, I wasn't goin' to come back 't all. I was jus' goin' to write ye an' go away. But I got to thinkin'—I thought about ye all the time an'—an'—first thing I knew I was on the train, comin' back here. An'—an'—I thought—jus' onct more I want to see 'im, to see if ev'rythin's all right, an' nen—"

"An' I come home drunk's a beast." For an instant the game was forgotten.

"Well, Alfred, first — I thought my heart would jus' natur'ly break. Seemed like the whole world was goin' wrong." She stopped a moment; then she said suddenly, sharply: "Alfred!" She even shook his shoulders a trifle. "You're goin' to keep straight, d'ye hear? Even if I'm not here? It'd simply kill me worryin' if I'd had to think— You'll promise, won't ye, Alfred?"

"Me promise? Dearie, what's the use? What'd my promise 'mount to anyhow, and what'd I care to promise for after you're gone?"

"But, Alfred—" It was a cry for mercy, for she, too, saw the end.

"Never mind me, little woman. It's where I get off."

"There's Dor'thy —" Her voice choked helplessly.

"Yes, there's Dor'thy."

Then the man turned his face to the wall again. He waited now. Be it said to his credit, he had compunction. There *was* Dorothy. But could this woman want her child with that same imperious demand, that same need with which he wanted *her*? No, there was no use; he must have her. He needed her, he loved her, he was fighting for what was his. It wasn't a square gamble, perhaps, but still he waited, building on the outcome. Without looking at her, he could see just how she stood retreated against

the wall, her great dark eyes brimful of the self-surrendering passion that had come to enrich his worthless life. And he should give that up for Dorothy?

The silence was lengthening into minutes. It came over him that maybe his hand was called—perhaps Dorothy had won out in spite of his brilliant bluff. The sudden fear impelled him to open his eyes and stare at her wildly, like a child taken from its mother. Then she came as she had always come, as she had deserted home, husband, and fair name; she threw herself on her knees by his bedside and clung to his arm.

"Alfred, Alfred, I can't do it. I can't. I love ye so. It's a sin, Lord forgive me, an' I'm a bad woman. But—but I can't leave ye, I can't!"

"There, there, dearie, don't take on so. It's for the best. I'd gone plumb to the dogs 'thout ye, an' if ye love me like that, ye'd be miserable without me. I ain't sayin' I deserve it."

Long after, with the sound of her careful footsteps coming to him from the kitchen, he dozed off to sleep, and the smile of the contented child had returned to his face. He had her now—had her forever; his need glossed his methods. And as for the raw wound in her heart—he gently turned his tentative conjectures aside when they threatened to become unpleasant.

EASTER.

ONE with the fair, white lilies, pure as the spotless snow,
A message of joy was uttered, centuries ago;
The chill of a winter was broken, the dawn came of love and peace—
It was Easter morn that brought them, with echoes that shall not cease.

Under dim eastern windows, sad with the symbols of night,
Suddenly blazed forth a splendor that put life's sorrows to flight.
An azure softer and bluer shone in the orient sky,
For a glory unheard of was witnessed, as the Easter hours went by.

The peaks of the purple mountains, the soft wind's balmier breath,
Joined well with the reverent wonder which fell on Nazareth;
Since He who had walked by the Jordan, and hallowed Galilee,
The doors of life had opened, for wonders yet to be.

Out of despair and darkness, up from sorrow and night,
Arose the song of the ages, with its gifts of joy and light;
Whose tale of triumph and glory, of sorrow and faith sublime,
Shall come to all men and nations, dark-shadowed by fate and time.

Joel Benton.

THE DUKE'S PAWN.*

BY FRANCES OLIN.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

DON LUIS DE FERIA, in love with Mercedes de Toledo, ward of the Duke of Alva, is on his way to the house of Countess Emanuele. A stranger hands him a sealed package, mistaking him for Florence Montmorency, Baron Montigny, to whom Feria bears a resemblance. At the mansion Feria finds the countess's maid in terror, the countess in a swoon, and Mercedes on her knees before a man who is threatening her. He recognizes Don Carlos, heir to the throne. Feria disarms the prince and announces Mercedes as his affianced wife. Countess Emanuele counsels Feria to flee from Madrid. As he leaves the house, he is set upon by three masked figures, who bear him away in a litter.

The Duke of Alva is anxious to lure the Netherland Counts Egmont, Horn, and Orange to Brussels. He is advised by his natural son, Don Ferdinando, to use the Baron Montigny for this task, or suggests his double, Feria.

Feria hesitates to accept the duke's proposal, but finally consents to go to the Netherlands, posing as Montmorency. Successful in this rôle, he persuades Count Horn to go with him to the tourney at Brussels. Feria is commanded by Alva to take Horn and Egmont to Don Ferdinando's banquet and bring them immediately afterward to the duke's presence at Culemborg House.

Feria is wounded in the tourney and suspects a secret enemy, presumably Carlos. Egmont is warned not to go to the banquet, but Don Ferdinando's scheme being carried through, Egmont and Horn are enticed to Alva's house and put in separate rooms, strongly guarded. Alva compliments Feria on the success of his efforts, gives him a document bearing the royal seal, and bids him hasten to Dillenburg to play a similar trick on William of Orange.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TRAP.



FERIA found, as Alva had told him, a horse saddled and in waiting for him in the courtyard of Culemborg House. The groom had had his instructions, for as Feria mounted and gathered up the bridle the man spoke:

"The duke told me to remind you, my lord, that you were to leave by the north gate, and that your men would be waiting for you outside."

Alva had, indeed, planned every detail of the hurried trip to Dillenburg. Relays of horses were to be furnished every few hours, and the men selected as retainers for the assumed Baron Montigny knew all the roads leading to the frontier.

Feria was, in truth, thankful to be gone. Although the difficulties connected with his mission to Orange were enormous, he preferred them to the revela-

tions sure to follow his longer stay in Brussels. He had completely hoodwinked Egmont and Horn; but he had grown fond of the ill-fated noblemen, and to face them after their knowledge of his deception seemed more than he could bear.

The prince, at least, was an unknown quantity, and there was a strong element of excitement in trying to dupe so astute a man. He galloped rapidly through the city. Night had come on, and most of the streets were dark. As he paused a moment in one of the public squares, the better to get his bearings for the north gate, he heard a clatter of hoofs behind him. He turned quickly as a mounted groom in the livery of the duke came up with him.

Both man and horse seemed blown. The man, after a moment, spoke:

"Am I addressing Baron Montigny?"

Feria nodded stiffly.

"Then," said the man breathlessly,

"I am to give you a message from the

* This story began in *THE CAVALIER* for February.

duke. He has important instructions for you that were forgotten, and he is waiting for you at the house of Count Matteo."

"Where is that?" asked Feria.

"A few streets from here," said the man evasively; "I will guide you."

Without a suspicion, Feria turned his horse's head and followed his guide. It seemed to him not unnatural that on so delicate a mission something should have been forgotten.

They drew up before a somber-looking house on a side street.

"Does Count Matteo live here?" asked Feria in surprise. He had heard of the count's great wealth, and this house seemed an ordinary mansion.

"He is here for the present," said the man briefly, "and the duke awaits you inside."

Feria knew the duke and Count Matteo were intimate friends. He dismounted.

"You will look after my horse," he said carelessly, and pounded on the massive door with his whip-handle.

In a moment the great door swung open, and Feria stepped inside. He found himself in a long, narrow passageway, dimly lighted. A man servant with an inscrutable face held up a lighted candle.

"This way, my lord," he murmured.

Feria followed him with hasty steps. The door at the rear of the hall immediately opened, and Feria found himself in a large, brilliantly lighted room that for the moment was empty.

He looked around in bewilderment. A sudden doubt crossed his mind, and he turned to retrace his steps; but another door opened, and one of the most beautiful women he had ever seen stood before him. He tried to collect his scattered wits. He had seen this face before.

The woman who faced Feria was young and beautifully proportioned. She was small in stature, but so perfect in shape one thought not of her height. Her eyes were large and lustrous, and her dark hair clustered in tiny tendrils about her oval face. She wore a blue, silken robe, embroidered with pearls. She stood before Feria with clasped hands, and looked at him long and in-

scrutably. As she gazed, the knowledge came to him suddenly who she was. The miniature shown him by the Countess Horn was of this woman, and it was Mme. Montigny.

In planning their adventure the duke had agreed with Feria that on no account was he to encounter the wife of Baron Montigny. This seemed possible since Mme. Montigny was in delicate health, had a young child, and had been living during her husband's absence in Spain on her father's estate in Touraine. Feria's sojourn in Brussels was so brief a one that the news of his return might easily not reach Mme. Montigny before his departure for Germany; and after his return with Orange the discovery of his identity would not matter. He had pleaded his wife's delicate health to Egmont and Horn as the reason for not bringing her immediately to Brussels, and that had seemed to them reasonable.

As the two gazed silently at each other, several schemes passed through Feria's fertile brain, the most persistent of which was to take her, in part, into his confidence, but to give her a pretended reason for his disguise. That she should actually take him for her husband did not cross his mind—it was too wildly improbable.

While he struggled for the fitting words, she spoke, looking at him with calm, direct gaze:

"I did not expect this treatment from you, Florence, although you have written so infrequently of late. When I was informed that you were in Brussels with the Duke of Alva I came immediately to the city. Why did you not send me word that you were here?"

Then she took him for the Baron Montigny. He rapidly took in the situation. He had been summoned to this house to meet the Duke of Alva. Was it her ruse, or another's? That he must know, but it forced him to keep up the masquerade. He knelt before her and kissed her hands. His voice was low and husky:

"Have patience with me! Have patience with me, and later I will tell you all! I have secret and weighty business for the king and must not linger even for my wife. Did you summon me here, or did the duke?" He looked directly

up at her with a sudden, piercing glance that commanded an honest answer.

"I summoned you," she said. "I sent a message through one of the duke's servants, for I could not be sure you would come to me otherwise." She began to sob. "Oh, what an ending this is to our love, Florence—what an ending!"

Feria was at his wit's end. Make up with her and kiss her he dare not. That was sure discovery. One rôle only could he play with the faintest chance of success. He stooped until he kissed the hem of her robe.

"I am not worthy of your love," he said faintly, "nor can I tell you now what brought me to Brussels. Later I will tell you everything, but to-night you must let me go on pressing business for the king."

He sprang suddenly to his feet as he spoke, and looked down at her.

She suddenly colored from brow to chin. She was unspeakably lovely.

"I will let you go, Florence," she said after a moment, "on one condition—that you take some supper with me before you depart. That is a small favor for a wife to ask."

Feria inwardly chafed and fumed. The men and horses were waiting outside the gate. Every moment was precious, and he had already lost time. But he could not be rough with her, and he wished to avoid a scene.

"I cannot give you explanations to-night," he said hurriedly; "and my business is pressing. Will you not let me go and trust me?"

"I will let you go in a quarter of an hour," she said firmly; "but we will have supper first." She touched a bell, and two men in yellow livery entered the room.

"Bring in supper at once," she ordered.

In a moment, as if by magic, a table was brought in, laid, and the two were seated. Feria was uncomfortable and ill at ease. What could this beautiful woman think of a husband so cold and churlish? But the servants were present, and he must say something.

"I have much to tell you of Spain," he blurted out; "some time you will go there, and I wish you to see it with my eyes."

"Do you care for it?" she asked softly. She never took her eyes from his face.

"Yes. One soon learns to love it," he said with forced lightness; "the skies are bluer and the grass greener than in this land of rain."

She gave him a peculiar look.

"Why did you call it in your letters a gloomy prison?" Feria felt that he was in deep waters.

"That was when I was out of favor with the king," he said with sudden inspiration. "Now that I have his confidence again, the witchery of the land is upon me."

The two had eaten rapidly in obedience to Feria's desire to hasten his departure, and Mme. Montigny made a sign to the servants to depart. She rose abruptly from her seat when they were again alone, and came close to Feria.

"Tell me," she said brokenly, and suddenly threw her arms about his neck: "Florence, do you love another woman?"

Feria released the arms and held the small hands firmly in his own. He must bring the interview to an end at all hazards.

"I will tell you everything when I return," he said huskily; "I will tell you what will satisfy you then. I cannot now." He rose, and stood facing her.

"Trust me," he said entreatingly, and backed toward the door through which he had entered.

"Stop!" An instantaneous change passed over the beautiful woman. Her eyes flashed. Her nostrils dilated. "You will not leave this room until you have proved to me that you are my husband." Feria looked at her dismayed.

"Do you not think that I am the Baron Montigny?"

"No! You have the face of my husband, his figure, his manner even; but you have not his voice, nor his character."

The game seemed up, but a sudden inspiration came to Feria. He remembered the packet, still in his doublet, that had been handed to him by the mysterious stranger in Madrid. He drew it forth.

"Do you think I could come into possession of this if I were not the Baron Montigny?"

She seized the packet with a cry and tore it open. The ring fell on the floor as she eagerly scanned the handwriting.

"It is my letter to my husband," she wailed. She picked up the ring. "It is my ring and my letter," she moaned; "and oh, how like him—how like him you are!"

She paced the room, wringing her hands. She was the picture of anguish and indecision.

Feria moved closer to the door and turned for a last word.

"When I return everything shall be clear between us. I will keep back nothing. Now, I must go." He put his hand on the door.

Like a cat, she sprang upon him and pushed him into the room. He was so taken by surprise that he did not instantly repulse her. With a swift movement she tore open his right sleeve and disclosed his naked arm. When she saw it she uttered a cry, and before he grasped the situation she put to her lips a small silver whistle which she wore concealed beneath her dress.

Before Feria could speak or turn, his hands were seized, his sword wrested from him, and he was securely bound by three masked men, who had entered on the sounding of the whistle.

One of the men removed his mask. It was the face of the unknown assailant in the courtyard of Culemborg House. He regarded Feria with an evil glitter in his eyes.

"Twice I have failed to kill you," he said savagely, "but I think the third time I shall be successful."

Feria fixed his eyes on Mme. Montigny. His only hope lay in her.

"Will you tell me the meaning of this?" he said steadily. The woman's beautiful eyes blazed with indignation.

"When I besought you a few moments ago, sir, to give me the proof that I desired, you put me off. I will be more gracious than you. When this man here"—she waved her hand toward the unmasked stranger—"came to me in Touraine and told me there was a man in Brussels impersonating my husband, I refused to believe him. It was too fantastic—too improbable. But I was troubled, and at last I agreed to come to Brussels, take a house, and secure an

interview with this false Baron Montigny.

"I found on reaching here there was indeed some one passing for my husband, and I believed in some horrible plot against Baron Montigny in Spain. I agreed to entrap you here and deliver you over to these men. I was greatly startled when I saw you, the resemblance was so wonderful. Still, I could see little differences—though when you gave me the ring and the letter my mind for a moment misgave me."

"Well," said Feria as she paused a moment.

"Well," Mme. Montigny continued, and her eyes were very bright, "my husband has a curious birthmark on his right arm, and I suddenly remembered that I could easily establish his identity." She glanced significantly at the torn sleeve.

"So, because of an imposture, you have delivered a man over to death," Feria said quietly.

"I have nothing to do with what happens to you now." Mme. Montigny shrugged her shoulders. "This man told me of the plot against my husband; and I agreed to hand you over, in case he were right."

"There is no plot against your husband," Feria said earnestly. "My chance resemblance to Baron Montigny will not harm him personally."

"Forgive me for doubting you," the lady said, and her lip curled. "I do not presume to fathom your plot, but I know it bodes ill for those who are dear to me."

"Listen," said Feria resolutely. "I am in the service of the king and the duke, and whoever makes away with me will have to reckon with the duke."

"Very well, sir," said the lady haughtily; "I am willing to recount to the duke my share in the matter. I have nothing further to do with it." She made him a low curtsy, and vanished.

Feria was bound hand and foot, and a masked figure stood on either side of him. The unmasked man stood directly in front of him.

"I suppose you would like to know, Don Luis de Feria, who I am, and why I am pursuing you?" The man's hard eyes looked directly into Feria's.

"Yes, I should like to know," Feria spoke in an even voice, rather absently.

He was calculating his chances. They were three to one, and he was disarmed and bound. Could he possibly summon help by a sudden outcry?

"I am the servitor of Don Carlos," said the man succinctly, "and I followed you from Spain at his bidding. I have cleared the path of Carlos many times, and no one has been the wiser. He has set an unusually high price on your head"—the man grinned disagreeably—"and I am in sore need of gold."

Before Feria could speak or cry out, the stranger made a sign, and one of the masked figures securely gagged him. Thus bound and gagged, he was utterly helpless.

Suddenly there seemed to be some commotion at the outer door. The unknown clapped on his mask and gave a rapid command in Spanish. The two men lifted Feria as if he had been a block of wood; and the three, with their burden, went hastily out of a rear door, which opened on a dark staircase.

Stumbling and cursing under their breath, they went up, what seemed to Feria, countless flights of stone stairs until they reached a narrow passageway without a door. The leader struck a light and revealed a wall studded with curious nails, but with no door visible. He took a paper from his doublet and studied it a while. He then pressed one of the nails with considerable force, but with no result. Again he studied his diagram, and this time chose a different nail on the wall.

Like magic it yielded to his touch, and a panel flew open, disclosing a long, narrow room, with a bed in one corner covered with rubbish, a grated window, and a fireplace with some antiquated iron dogs. There was no other furniture.

The men deposited their burden on the floor, and turned to their leader for further orders. The panel-door was open behind them. Suddenly there came to them from below a muffled sound of scuffling feet and angry voices. With an oath, the man who had spoken to Feria sprang into the passageway, closely followed by the other two. One of them turned and closed the panel with a click. It was a spring-door.

The three men fled precipitately the way they had come until they reached

the head of the first flight of stairs. There they paused. The hall below was filled with men, and an altercation was going on between Mme. Montigny's servants and the newcomers. Suddenly a deep, powerful voice was heard above the others.

"Take me instantly to Mme. Montigny!"

There was an opening and shutting of doors, and the three men in the hall above shrank back into the shadow. The leader spoke.

"That was the duke. We must instantly leave the house by the rear staircase."

With some difficulty this was accomplished, and the three emerged into the night.

The plot against Feria had miscarried. When the duke's groom—who had been bribed to escort Feria to the house where Mme. Montigny awaited him—returned to Culemborg House it occurred to him that he might make double money. He gained admittance to the duke, and told his story in the main truthfully, keeping back, however, the incident of the bribe.

His story was that he had been waylaid by a strange man who had told him the duke was awaiting Baron Montigny in a house in a side street, and that he must instantly overtake the baron and escort him there. After leaving Feria, the groom averred, he rode back to Culemborg House, and was greatly astonished at seeing the duke pass through the courtyard.

Alva, who had just encompassed the arrest of Egmont and Horn, at once mistrusted a plot against Feria. Taking the groom as guide, with a score of mounted men he rode quickly to the house hired for Mme. Montigny by the emissary of Carlos. The groom, frightened now at the effect of his recital, protested volubly that he had merely seen the Baron Montigny enter the house, and that he himself had ridden directly back to Culemborg House. As a matter of fact, Feria's horse still stood before the door where the groom had fastened him.

It took several moments after entering for the duke to ascertain to whom the house belonged, for Mme. Mon-

tigny's servants—brought by her from Touraine—were struck dumb by the sight of so many armed men. At length one of them spoke, in answer to the duke's harsh inquiry.

"It is Mme. Montigny who lives here."

Then the duke had made the reply heard by the conspirators on the floor above:

"Take me instantly to Mme. Montigny."

Mme. Montigny, after the dramatic climax of her interview with FERIA, had retired to her bedroom. Deeply agitated by the doubts and fears which had assailed her, she endeavored to form some reasonable plan of action. For months she had endeavored to get her husband back from Spain, where she had reason to think Philip was plotting against him. She had sent him the warning received by FERIA, through a special courier, and so keen was her anxiety, she realized that she would prefer to have entrapped an erring husband than to meet this certainty that he was still in Spain. She went over mentally the plan she had formed of taking her child, and sailing for Spain. She was thus engaged in meditation when her maid burst in upon her with pale face and startled eyes.

"The Duke of Alva is demanding to see you, *madame*, in the large salon."

Mme. Montigny rose with an uneasiness she could not define, and entered the room where Alva was awaiting her. She had been out of the country on Alva's arrival; but rumors of the power entrusted to him by the king, and his harsh and cruel nature, had reached her in Touraine. She dreaded the interview.

Alva stood in the middle of the apartment, a grim and formidable figure clad in armor. He had but scant time for explanations.

"I wish to know instantly, *madame*, where is Baron Montigny?"

Mme. Montigny turned the color of marble, but she did not falter.

"The man who entered my house an hour since was not the Baron Montigny."

"Very well, *madame*, I wish to know where the man is who entered your house an hour since."

"I cannot tell you." She faltered perceptibly. "He was an impostor, and I gave him over to the man who brought him here."

"Who was that?"

"I do not know—some one sent by Don Carlos, who has followed him from Spain."

"*Madame*, the man who entered your house must be found."

"But, your grace, I have no knowledge of what they have done with him."

"Summon your servants." The duke's stern features relaxed not a muscle.

Trembling, the unhappy woman rang for her maid.

"Send all the men in here, Suzanne."

In a few moments the frightened servants were huddled together in the salon. The duke looked them over. There were ten burly fellows.

"You all saw the Baron Montigny enter a short time ago?"

The men looked at their mistress in a dazed way. They had served Mme. Montigny in Touraine since the departure of her husband, and they had never seen the Baron Montigny.

"The servants know nothing, your grace," said Mme. Montigny piteously. "They are French, and have never seen the Baron Montigny."

"Very well." The duke spoke in his harshest voice, and turned towards the quaking servants. "The man who entered this house an hour or so since is the Baron Montigny, and he has been made away with. You will help my men search the house from top to bottom, every nook and cranny, and if the Baron Montigny is not found you will pay for it with your necks."

Mme. Montigny gave a low cry, and fainted in the arms of her maid.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ESCAPE.

FERIA, left on the floor, in the upper room of the house on the side street, lay for a long time motionless after the panel door clicked behind the escaping men. He was too far back in the room to have heard the muffled noises from below, and he had no clue

to the reason for the hasty exit of the three men. For a long time he lay, expecting their return, and when he heard the sound of voices and hurrying feet in the narrow passageway, he momentarily expected the door to swing open and the end to come.

As the night wore on, it occurred to him that for some reason he was allowed a few hours of grace, and that escape might be possible. The duke's men, after searching every nook and corner, being in ignorance of the secret door, finally left the house, and stillness reigned.

Feria was bound and gagged. To most men there would have seemed no loophole for escape. But to a quick-witted, athletic youth, many difficult things are possible. As he lay where they had placed him on the floor, he noticed that the iron dogs in the fireplace were broken—one of them snapped short off, leaving a sharp piece of iron. It occurred to him he might use it to break the cords on his hands.

The moonlight streaming through the small window gave him some light, and with extreme difficulty he rolled himself across the floor to the fireplace. The iron dog lay broken in two; and, painfully raising himself, Feria managed to work the rope that secured his hands back and forth over the sharp bit of iron made by the break.

It was slow and wearisome work. The rope was stout and securely tied, and his feet were so tightly bound every movement was painful. By resting at frequent intervals, he managed at last, with infinite patience, to break through one strand—then another, until at last, as the first faint streaks of dawn told him the night was over, he found the rope so weakened he was able by a great effort of strength to break it. His wrists were bleeding, but he removed the gag and, after a while, with difficulty loosened the cords about his feet.

When he finally stood erect and free, the sun was shining into the narrow room. He looked carefully about, and found the door securely fastened by a spring-lock. The window was grated, but the iron bars were broken, so that a slender man could work his body through the aperture.

Feria peered down, and found the house in which he was confined was considerably higher than its neighbors. If he succeeded in getting on the window-ledge, his only possible means of escape was to make a jump across a narrow street onto an adjoining roof, some ten feet lower than his standing place. It was an excessive risk, and Feria cast about for some means by which he could lessen it.

The ropes that had secured him were cut in pieces, but on removing the rubbish from the bed he discovered it was a rope bedstead, with the ropes still in fair condition. Feria managed to piece together about twenty feet of this rope, which he made fast to the iron grating of the window. His plan was, in making his desperate leap, to have the cord to draw himself up by, in case he missed. He made a large loop, which he grasped firmly with one hand, and after much patience stood outside his window on the narrow ledge.

He carefully calculated the distance, and, with the rope in one hand, made the leap. Before he touched the lower roof he had let the rope go, for he had made it too short. He had calculated the jump to perfection, and was not even thrown down by it. There seemed to be, on his examination, but one window by which he could enter the house where he now stood, and that was barred.

While he stood considering this difficulty, a man's face suddenly presented itself at the window. The eyes of the man seemed starting from his head, and he gave a low whistle of astonishment. Feria had crawled along the roof, and was supporting himself on the narrow ledge outside the window, as he gazed through the bars within.

It was a small room, and evidently a bedchamber. The man was unwashed and unshaven, and had a shock of red hair, which stood out about his face like the quills of a porcupine. As he was about to call out lustily, Feria stopped him with his finger on his lips, and after a moment whispered to him in French:

"I am a nobleman in the Duke of Alva's service, and there has been a plot against my life. If you will file these iron bars so that I can get in this house, I will give you gold enough to keep you

comfortable the rest of your days, and the duke will reward you to boot."

The fellow's greedy-eyes snapped with excitement:

"How do I know you have any gold?"

For answer, Feria drew a gold coin from his doublet and threw it into the room. The duke had, in fact, amply supplied him with money.

The man with the red hair hesitated. If he could kill Feria without discovery, he could get all the gold on his person. But if he were, in truth, in the service of the duke, the murder might be found out, and his neck would be the penalty. It was well known in Flanders that Alva's hand was bloody as well as swift, and it was best to be on the prudent side.

"I will file the bars," he said shortly.

He was gone so long that Feria gave himself up for lost. He had doubtless gone to summon assistance. The man, however, was too shrewd for that. If there was gold in this quarry, he did not propose to share it with another. He made sure that he would be undisturbed, armed himself in case the stranger attempted violence, and began his work of wrenching the bars. Being a man of great physical strength, this did not take long, and Feria soon found himself in a small, low room face to face with a man of huge stature and sinister aspect. Feria was unarmed, as his sword had been wrested from him by the masked men. But he had a stronger weapon than a sword. He drew forth from his doublet the paper with the royal seal.

"On secret business for the king," he said tersely. "There is a plot against me, and the duke will reward the man who gets me safely to the frontier. He will also punish my murderer," he added grimly.

The pupils of the man's eyes contracted. This stranger carried the royal seal, he was dressed like a man of rank, and he had gold to dispense. His course was clear.

"I can get you safely out of this house, my lord, and can take you to the frontier."

"I will go first to the north gate of the city and see if any of my men are there. What house is this?" Feria asked suddenly.

"The tavern of the White Wolf."

"And who are you?"

"An officer in the Flemish army!" the stranger said with some reluctance. He failed to add that he was an officer in disgrace.

"Very well. How can you get me out of the house without attracting attention?"

"That I can manage easily," the man returned. "You can wear a cloak and plumed hat of mine."

This was done, and the two men emerged from the tavern door without attracting attention. It was noon now; and as they hastened toward the north gate, Feria felt that his chances of finding any of the duke's men there were of the smallest. In this he was mistaken, for Alva had given orders that a guard be posted at the gate until news was obtained of Feria, but an unexpected happening prevented the two men from reaching the gate as they had planned.

The red-haired man was no other than Jan Ostade, a well-known Flemish captain in the king's service. Through some looting, which had incurred the ire of his superior officer, Ostade had been deprived of his command and ordered to leave the country with a fellow officer who had been guilty of the same offense. The two men had, however, skulked about the city, and the landlord of the White Wolf had been willing to smuggle them in for a goodly sum paid down. This was the first time that Ostade had ventured openly upon the streets; but, with his hat pulled down over his eyes and a swaggering gait, he hoped to escape detection. It was the hat and cloak of his brother officer in disgrace that Feria was wearing.

As the two men turned a sharp corner not very distant from the north gate, a gust of wind seized the long plume in Ostade's hat, and it was blown across the street. At that moment a man in armor, superbly mounted, with a small company of troops, bore down upon them. The man was General Van Eyck, Ostade's superior officer.

Without his hat, his flaming locks blowing about his face, Ostade was a conspicuous figure. Van Eyck instantly recognized him, and stopped on the instant.

"Arrest that man, take him to the fortress, and keep him in chains until his case comes on," he said in a voice of thunder. Alva had reprimanded him more than once for his lax discipline. Here was a chance to retrieve himself.

"You were sentenced to banishment before, sir, but this time you will not get off so easily." Then, observing Feria, who wore the mantle and hat of his followers, and taking him not unnaturally for the fellow officer implicated with Ostade, whom he personally did not know, he pointed at him.

"You will arrest that fellow, too, and take him to the same prison. They will be tried together."

Before Feria could remonstrate or explain, he was surrounded by armed men, bound, and taken forcibly in an opposite direction from that he had started. He was separated from Ostade, nor did he see him when they reached the prison. He was thrown unceremoniously into a small cell.

In vain he endeavored to get a word with his jailers. They turned a deaf ear to his remonstrances and explanations. Every one, in fact, was in a state of suspense in Brussels. Granvelle had departed, the Duchess of Parma had been superseded, and Alva had come. No one knew definitely what the next move might be. Certainly laxity would not be allowed under the iron hand of the duke, and it was best to be on the safe side.

So Feria, as safely hidden from Alva as if he had remained in the upper chamber with the spring-door, fretted and fumed, while large placards were placed about the streets offering a reward for information about the Baron Montigny.

The duke concluded, from all absence of information, that the assumed Baron Montigny must have been made away with in the short time that elapsed between Feria's entering the house of Mme. Montigny and his own arrival. Not a trace could he find of Feria's unknown enemy with the scar, although he put all his machinery at work to ferret out the man.

As the days passed he reluctantly admitted that his plan to capture Orange must come to naught, for the prince refused to answer his letters and there was no emissary he could send. A week after

the second capture of Feria the duke was working over some papers at Culemborg House, when one of his pages entered with an embarrassed air.

"Will it please your grace to see a man who has been in the king's service, and who says he has some important information to give?"

The duke scowled. He had interviewed so many men in the past seven days, only to find that they really knew nothing. But he could not afford to throw away a chance.

"Very well, tell the fellow to be quick with his information," said the duke impatiently.

A slight, fair-haired man in citizen's dress was ushered into the room. The duke regarded him suspiciously.

"I understood you were in the king's service, sir. Why are you not dressed as a soldier?"

The man flushed.

"I will explain that later, your grace. I have come to give you information about Baron Montigny."

The duke fixed him sharply with his eyes.

"Well?"

"I will give you this information, your grace, only on one condition." The man spoke without a tremor, and looked directly into the duke's eyes.

Alva was astounded. This was temerity, indeed—to make conditions with the governor-general of the Netherlands! But he liked pluck.

"What is your condition?"

"If what I tell you proves true, you will have a brother officer and myself restored to our old rank in the army. We have been unjustly disgraced, and we ask for reparation. That is my one condition."

"Very well," said the duke carelessly. He was always ready to make promises.

"I must have a guarantee, your grace," said the man firmly. He knew what Alva's promises were worth.

The duke glowered at him.

"I am not in the habit of giving guarantees."

"Very well, your grace." The man turned to go.

"Stop." The duke looked at him curiously.

"What is to prevent my men from

seizing you, throwing you into prison, and getting the information out of you—in various ways?" he asked grimly.

"There is nothing to prevent your trying, but you would not gain the information that way."

Something in the man's face impressed Alva. He suddenly doubted whether torture would work in this case.

"What do you demand as guarantee?" he asked, frowning.

"A written order reinstating Jan Ostade and myself in our old rank, signed with your own seal, your grace!"

The Duke of Alva had a curious foible. His word he disregarded, the royal seal he affixed without hesitation to any deed of treachery, but he had a curious compunction about his own signature. He had never yet dishonored an agreement to which he had affixed his ducal coat of arms. He hesitated a long moment. Then he made up his mind.

"This is the condition, then," he said harshly—"I give you my written guarantee to reinstate you and Jan Ostade in the Flemish army in case you produce Baron Montigny within twenty-four hours. If you do not produce him at the end of that time, you shall be shot."

The man bowed. "I accept your condition, your grace!"

Without more words, the duke seated himself and wrote an order rapidly. He handed the paper to the man, who glanced at it and bowed again.

"I can take you to the Baron Montigny more easily than I can bring him to you."

"Where is he?"

"In prison, your grace."

"How do you know this?"

"Because I have been stopping at the White Wolf with Jan Ostade since—since our trouble with our superior officer. A week ago, while I was absent for a few hours, Ostade disappeared. My cloak and hat also disappeared, and the landlord, who is a good friend of ours, told me Ostade had been arrested, together with a companion, who was doubtless taken for me.

"I had no clue of the meaning of this until I read the placards announcing the disappearance of Baron Montigny from the house back of the White Wolf. I examined Ostade's bedroom, and found

the iron bars at the window had been broken, and that a piece of rope hung from a window in the house supposed to have been occupied by Montigny. I gathered from this that Ostade had helped the baron to escape, and that he had worn my clothing to avoid recognition."

"You know the prison where they are confined?"

"I do, your grace."

"But you yourself have not seen this man you suppose to be Baron Montigny?"

"I have not, your grace, nor do I know the Baron Montigny by sight."

The duke reflected. This was the first explanation he had had of Feria's disappearance, and while he did not know of the secret chamber, he knew that many of the old houses in Brussels contained them. If this fellow's story were true, and his comrade had really attempted to assist Feria, he could afford to be generous.

"Very well, sir, you shall escort me to this prison, and if I find your story true, I will take you and Ostade into my own service."

They reached the prison in a short time, and Ostade was summoned into the duke's presence. He changed color when he saw his old comrade-in-arms, but some secret intelligence passed between the two men, and he gave the duke a tolerably truthful account of what had happened.

He had seen a stranger at his window, who had begged for admittance, and who had told him he was in the duke's service. They had planned to escape together, but through an untoward accident they had been arrested.

The duke summoned the other prisoner, and Feria was brought in.

He substantiated all that the two men had said. He described the room into which he had been thrown, the secret door, and his successful effort in freeing himself. All had been going well until Ostade and he had been arrested. To that arrest he had no clue.

The commandant of the prison was brought in, and sharply reprimanded for not ascertaining the identity of both his prisoners. The duke then turned to the two men:

"You are both in my service from this time, and your first duty shall be to escort Baron Montigny to the north gate, where a guard is awaiting him.

He drew Feria one side.

"You will carry out our plan as arranged upon. Orange must cross the frontier even if you cannot get him to Brussels. Make him understand that the lives of Egmont and Horn depend upon it. I will give you plenty of time to accomplish this, for Egmont and Horn are safely imprisoned now in Ghent."

CHAPTER IX.

A ROYAL EXILE.

IN the woods back of the old castle by the Dill the Prince of Orange was taking his daily walk. It was not two months since he had wound up his affairs in the Netherlands and crossed the frontier into Germany. He had been received with open arms by his brothers, who occupied the old ancestral castle at Dillenburg, and with his wife and children had been made as comfortable as circumstances permitted. But it was a great change in the estate of one of the richest and proudest princes in the land, and no man knew the ultimate intentions of William of Orange.

He was at this time thirty-five years of age, tall and finely built, grave in manner, distinguished in bearing, and with the singular power, that he always possessed, of reading men's hearts while his own was a sealed book. He had adapted himself at once to his changed conditions, and his affability, cheerfulness, and tact were such that no man could have told he regretted the pomp and splendor of his life at Brussels.

One man suspected that the departure of the prince from Flanders was the first step in a carefully thought out and premeditated plan. Louis of Nassau was the favorite brother of William of Orange, and it was to get the aid of this fearless and ardent soldier, "*Les bon chevalier*," as he was nicknamed, that determined the prince to take up his residence in the crowded and uncomfortable castle on the Dill.

As the prince slowly paced his favorite wood-path back of the castle, on a Sep-

tember morning, the day after the arrest of Egmont and Horn, he seemed sunk in painful meditation. His hands were clasped behind him, and his head sunk on his breast, so that he totally failed to perceive the figure of a man rapidly approaching him from a side-path.

The man was Louis of Nassau, and understanding well his brother's moods he fell behind him in the path for a while, in order not to disturb his meditations. The prince, after a little, roused from his reverie and, hearing a slight sound, turned and faced his brother.

The contrast in the two men was great. Louis, eager and impetuous, was quick-tempered, voluble, and outspoken. Reticence and reserve were unknown to him, and hence it was that the prince trusted him in action, but not always in counsel. The affection between the two was of an unusual order.

"Well, *chevalier*," began the prince, smiling. Louis impulsively linked his arm in that of his brother.

"May I not know your real design in coming to Dillenburg? Was it only to avoid collision with Alva?"

The prince regarded him affectionately.

"Surely that is reason enough. I expect daily to hear of the arrest of Egmont and Horn."

"Then you have left for good and all the service of Philip?" Louis asked.

"I have not said so," returned the prince cautiously. "I may be unwilling to serve the king's minister, and yet be loyal to the king."

Louis regarded him with perplexity. Philip II of Spain was a powerful monarch, feared and hated by France and Austria, but the pugnacious Protestant would have fought him single-handed. He had hoped the coming of the prince meant an open revolt. The rising of the Huguenots in France and the Protestants in the Netherlands could be made formidable. The daring and audacious soldier itched for the contest.

"Now is the time to strike," he said eagerly, and touched the hilt of his sword. "I can raise troops for you throughout Germany, and the cities in Flanders will help you."

The prince turned upon him the deep look that the younger man had not yet learned to read.

"I have written the king of my continued loyalty, although I am out of the kingdom, and I have given him my reasons for refusing to take the new oath."

Louis's face fell. "Then you do not intend to take up arms against Alva?"

"Not until he proceeds to more extreme measures than at present."

"The princess intends to return to Flanders to prevent the confiscation of her property there," Louis said suddenly, eyeing his brother.

Over the face of the prince a swift cloud passed. Through his deep anxieties, perplexities, and difficulties Anne of Saxony was the one thorn in the flesh impossible to remove, even by the exercise of supreme tact and sagacity.

This unfortunate marriage had already become excessively galling to the prince, but with his remarkable self-restraint he concealed it from the world.

"I do not think the princess will return to the Netherlands without me," he said dryly.

"But you have left Philip there?" his brother said involuntarily.

The shade grew deeper on the prince's face. He had indeed left his eldest son behind him in the Netherlands.

"My departure was not a flight," he said quietly. "Why should I anticipate harm to Philip?"

"Then you are willing to go back to Brussels?" Louis asked, mystified.

The prince turned and regarded him with unflinching gaze.

"What I do next depends upon the course of events. I have given up my residence in Flanders, and have established myself here. Waiting is my motto at present."

"Do not go to Brussels," said Louis of Nassau entreatingly. "They will lay some trap for you."

"I shall wait here to learn how it fares with Egmont and Horn," the prince said slowly.

"In the meantime," his brother answered impatiently, "we are not to levy troops or do anything?"

"Not while we hold our allegiance to the king," the prince answered steadily.

"I shall go and fight, then, with the Huguenots," Louis said impetuously.

The prince gazed at him long and affectionately.

"No, you will stay here with me, brother, until the time is ripe for action. When that time comes you will have all the difficult tasks laid upon you that you can desire."

The brothers had wandered far in the beech woods. They were suddenly arrested by a long, shrill whistle. The prince took a small object from his doublet and blew it. In a moment a servant in the Nassau livery appeared, panting and blowing.

"It is the princess, your highness," he stammered.

"What of her?"

"She is starting with her ladies in waiting for Brussels."

"Hasten back to the castle," the prince said imperiously. "and tell the princess she is not to go until I get there."

The fellow departed, and without a word the brothers retraced their steps to the castle.

Anne of Saxony, gorgeously attired, was already in her litter. Her ladies in waiting, delighted at leaving the dull life which they hated, even for a brief season, were flitting about like butterflies, giving orders, bringing out in haste forgotten toilet perquisites, and chattering like magpies.

A sudden silence fell on the little group at sight of the prince. Behind all his urbanity and graciousness lay an inflexible will, and the women who surrounded his wife knew that the princess had as yet never successfully opposed her husband.

The prince regarded calmly the flushed, perturbed faces turned toward him, and smiled slightly.

"I am most sorry to interfere with these arrangements for a journey," he said pleasantly, "but it is absolutely necessary I should have a conference with the princess, and no traveling can be attempted to-day."

The princess, still in her litter, regarded her husband with clouded and angry eyes. She had made all her preparations secretly for the journey to Brussels, and had hoped to take her departure while the prince was away from the castle. She had not, as yet, openly defied her husband, but the relations between them were becoming daily more strained. She stiffly, dismounted from her litter.

"We will postpone the journey until to-morrow," she said haughtily to the Baroness Grafenstein, who had followed her from Dresden, and was her trusted friend and intimate; and without a word to the prince she entered the castle.

William of Orange looked wistfully at the Baroness Grafenstein. He so needed assistance in the management of the wilful and erratic creature who bore his name.

"It is necessary, for reasons of state, that the princess should not leave Dillenburg at present. Can we contrive, baroness, by any means to make the castle more acceptable to her?"

The Baroness Grafenstein had been the friend and playmate of Anne of Saxony from childhood, and knew better than others the obstinacy and unreasonableness of her strange nature. She shook her head sadly.

"She was never contented in Flanders, you remember, and in her father's house it was just the same."

The great elector's daughter had, in fact, inherited all the most vicious qualities of her ancestors. Proud and passionate, obstinate and vindictive, she had also a strain of sensuality that in the end proved her undoing. The prince found her angrily pacing the floor of her bedroom when he entered the castle. She turned on him savagely.

"You humiliate me before all my women, sir, and order me about as if I were a mere chattel. In my father's house my word was law."

The prince seated himself and waited for the first gust of fury to spend itself. His quietness at last infected her somewhat, and she threw herself sullenly on a divan.

"Will you kindly tell me if I am a prisoner in this castle?"

"Your words are uncalled for, Anne." The prince's voice was even and passionless. "I have always granted you every indulgence in my power. You know that nothing but necessity drove me from the Netherlands. I cannot permit you to go back, for your life would not be safe."

"But Count Egmont and Count Horn are in Brussels," said the princess, startled.

"I expect to hear daily that they are in prison," the prince returned.

Anne of Saxony regarded her husband somberly. He had always been inscrutable to her. When they were rich and powerful he had often seemed depressed and preoccupied. Now that they were poor, and living under comfortable conditions, his spirit seemed calm and cheerful. For her part, she hated her narrow life.

"You might at least try to save my property in Flanders from confiscation," she blurted out.

The prince's brow grew furrowed. He had converted all of the available Netherlands property into gold, but his wife's large interests there he had been unable to protect. It galled him to think that she should be made poorer through her alliance with him.

"I will see what can be done through my Brussels agent," he said hastily.

"Why not go yourself to Brussels for a brief stay, and see what can be done?" the princess asked eagerly. Avarice was fast becoming with her a ruling passion; and to save her dowry she was ready to put her head in the lion's mouth.

"And share the fate of Egmont and Horn?" the prince asked cuttingly.

"What has happened to them?"

"I expect hourly to hear of their arrest."

"The Baron Montigny, too?" asked the princess unexpectedly.

"The Baron Montigny is in Spain."

"I beg your pardon," the princess was triumphant—it was rarely indeed that she had information unknown to her husband—"a special courier from the Countess Horn begged me to be in Brussels for the great tourney given by Alva and Montigny!"

"Montigny in Brussels!" murmured the prince. "Why, that recent letter I had from him stated he was virtually a prisoner in Spain."

"Read what the Countess Horn says." The princess rose and found the letter, which she handed to the prince.

"Very strange!" said the prince slowly. "There were special reasons why Montigny should have kept me informed about his movements. Why did you not tell me of this invitation to the tourney?" he asked suddenly.

The princess turned scarlet. In truth, it was one of her numerous intrigues

that had made her wish to return to Flanders, as much as the hope of saving her property; and she much preferred to return alone.

"You care nothing for tournaments," she said confusedly, "and you had already refused to return to Brussels, so I decided to take the journey with my women."

The prince looked at her with comprehending eyes. He understood her falseness, her potential infidelity, her utter unscrupulousness. But the time was not ripe for him to leave her, and she must be kept from complicating matters in the Netherlands.

"I forbid your return to Brussels," he said firmly, "but if the Baron Montigny is not arrested with Egmont and Horn I may go there myself to secure a meeting with him."

There was a sudden loud knock on the door.

"A special courier waits below to see your highness," said a breathless maid who entered.

The prince rose hastily and stepped below. The man awaiting him in the hall was splashed from head to foot with mud. He had ridden fast and far.

"What news?" asked the prince briefly.

"Counts Egmont and Horn have been arrested by order of the Duke of Alva at Culemborg House."

"Where are they imprisoned?"

"At Culemborg House."

The prince paced slowly to and fro, his hands behind him. At last he stopped.

"When does the trial come off?"

"I could not find that out, your highness."

"Is Baron Montigny in Brussels?"

"He is, your highness."

"And not under arrest?"

"He is not, your highness. He is on intimate terms with Alva, and is stopping at Culemborg House."

"But Count Horn is his brother. Why should Alva let Montigny go free?"

"I cannot say, your highness, but the Baron Montigny was at Don Ferdinando's banquet with Egmont and Horn."

"Perhaps he has escaped," the prince

said slowly. He remained for a long time lost in thought. Then he seated himself, wrote a few words, sealed the paper, and handed it to the messenger.

"Go back to Brussels, and deliver this paper to Baron Montigny himself. If you cannot gain access to him, bring the paper back to me at Dillenburg."

"Very well, your highness."

"What can be the meaning of Montigny's return to Flanders?" thought the prince. "He wrote that the king refused to let him leave Madrid. And now he goes free, while Egmont and Horn are under arrest; I must see him if I have to go to Brussels."

The following day there was great excitement in Dillenburg castle. The prince had left early in the morning, ostensibly for Dresden, and he had not been gone two hours before a special courier arrived from France. That his message was important was evident from his crestfallen appearance on hearing of the prince's absence.

The princess, thwarted in her plan of going to Brussels, had remained sulkily in her chamber since the interview with her husband. The prince had never admitted her into his confidence, and she was in utter ignorance of his ultimate plans. With the restlessness and curiosity of her nature, this position had been most galling. She had relieved herself in several interviews with Louis of Nassau by uttering sharp and cutting criticisms of this conduct.

The count had been entirely loyal to his brother; but in his impulsiveness he had let fall sundry remarks that had been construed by the princess as meaning defection from the throne of Spain. Believing that the prince ultimately intended to defy the king, she was the more eager to convert her Netherlands property immediately into gold. At all hazards she wished to insure the prince's absence from Dillenburg, that she might unmolested carry out her private schemes.

The arrival of the French courier was made known to her at once by the Baroness Grafenstein. She took her resolve.

"Have the man shown at once to my own apartment, Marie: I have something to say to him."

The baroness looked at her, startled.

"It is a private matter for the prince," she murmured.

"Have the man shown up here," the princess returned haughtily. "In the prince's absence I am ruler here."

Contrary to her usual custom, she banished all her maids from the room, and asked the Baroness Grafenstein to await her below. When she was alone with the courier she assumed her most regal manner.

"In the absence of the prince I decide all matters of state."

The man hesitated. He had been told to deliver his despatch to the prince himself.

"I can wait a few hours," he said cautiously.

"Hand the paper to me," the princess said imperiously. Now was the time for her to assert her authority. At worst, she expected a sharp reprimand. It had not dawned on her consciousness that the prince was capable of putting her away.

She took the paper and broke the seal. It was a terse line from Admiral Coligni asking for immediate assistance for the Huguenot cause in France. Three bodies of troops were asked for. The princess considered.

"Take back the verbal answer to the admiral that the prince will send him assistance without fail."

The courier left with alacrity. He was impressed with the haughty bearing and decision of the princess. In France the weak king was the puppet and tool of the queen-mother, and the courier did not know the character of William of Orange.

Two days later the prince returned. The princess met him with an air of bravado.

"I sent back the messenger who brought this paper with a verbal answer to Admiral Coligni."

The prince grew white to the lips.

"What answer did you send, *madame*?"

"That you would send him assistance."

The prince stood a moment in silence; then he turned and faced his wife.

"Since I was absent why did you not give the paper to Louis of Nassau? He is my most trusted friend."

The princess winced.

"I knew you were friends with Coligni, and I thought a promise to help him could do no harm."

"I always keep my promises, *madame*."

The princess turned pale under her rouge. In truth, she understood the conditions then existing no better than a child. She was far from foreseeing the revolt of the Netherlands. But she loved political intrigue with all the passion of a perverted nature.

The prince rapidly made his decision. He looked into his wife's eyes with the look she most feared.

"*Madame*, I brook no interference in affairs of state. This is a first offense; but the second time that my private papers are opened by you, you return to your uncle's house."

This was the last thing that Anne of Saxony desired. She had received more consideration from her husband than her uncle, the imperious and irascible elector, had ever dreamed of giving her. She felt it was time to change her tactics.

"I felt sure you would assist Coligni, but I beg pardon if I have blundered."

The prince left her without a word. It was indeed a serious blunder at this juncture. William of Orange was not willing to openly espouse the Protestant cause in a foreign country until he was able to take the same stand in Flanders. He was still nominally a faithful subject of Philip, and a Catholic. He sought out his brother.

"Word must immediately be taken to Coligni. Louis, that I cannot at present give any assistance to the Huguenots. I cannot trust any messenger but you. Will you go?"

And the *bon chevalier*—eager always to do his brother's slightest bidding—left in haste for the French frontier.

A few days passed in which the prince made a second hurried journey for Dresden, the purpose of which he disclosed to no one.

Then the messenger he had sent a second time to Brussels returned.

"What news of Baron Montigny?" the prince demanded sharply.

The man shook his head in perplexity.

"No one could give me accurate information," he said reluctantly. "He certainly has not been imprisoned, nor

is he in Brussels. My spies told me he had left the city with a retinue of followers, and was apparently going to the German frontier."

"To escape, probably," the prince returned briefly. "What do they say in Brussels about Egmont and Horn?"

"Very little, your highness. They have been kept in Culemborg House, but no one seems to know the duke's real intentions."

Later that day the prince went off on one of his lonely tramps, accompanied only by his dogs. Nothing refreshed and stimulated him as did solitude. For years immersed in affairs of state, dispensing a princely hospitality, and prominent in all matters concerning the Netherlands, this sudden change to comparative obscurity and the quiet of the old castle, where he was not master, rested and revived him. No longer besieged by clamorous petitioners of his bounty, nor forced to give all his working hours to social and state functions, the philosophical and spiritual side of his nature, long in abeyance, grew and flourished.

It was afterwards said of him that it was in the woods by the Dill he was slowly transformed from a Catholic into a stout Protestant; and it is certain the long weeks spent in Dillenburg fortified and prepared him for the tremendous conflict in which he was about to engage.

This fair September afternoon, as he rambled with his dogs, his mind was busy with the arrest of Egmont and Horn, and his duty toward them. It was as he had expected. Under the guise of friendship, Philip had kept the great nobles in Brussels, and Alva was now removing the mask. But would he venture to go to the uttermost limit? Would he dare publicly to execute Egmont and Horn? Whatever fate was in store for his friends he knew was in store for him. Yet it was bitter to stay quietly out of the country, and lift not a finger to save them.

As he walked with long, powerful strides through the forest he tried to formulate some plan. If Egmont and Horn had only crossed the frontier with him. But the time was not ripe yet for a general uprising through Flanders.

The people would have to be roused to desperation by bloody deeds of violence. The prince knew by his sinking heart that they would be forthcoming.

The secret tribunals of the Inquisition—the decision of Philip that all convicted of heresy should suffer death "by fire, by the pit, or by the sword," had shaken with fear the Protestant provinces of the empire. Hundreds of persons in Flanders, and in Spain even, had disappeared no one knew whither, until they reappeared again, clothed in the fatal garb of the *san benito*, to take part in the tragic spectacle of an *auto da fè*.

Yet how could Alva execute Egmont, who was known as a staunch Catholic the length and breadth of the land? What friends they had been always; what battles they had fought; what victories they had won together! The hero of Gravelines and St. Quentin to die by the executioner! Monstrous, incredible! Yet was it his duty, mayhap, to go to Brussels and thunder forth his protests!

These thoughts raced through the prince's mind as the shadows grew longer on that September afternoon, and often, it seemed to him, he was reasoning in a circle and returning ever to the point from which he had started. The setting sun was illuminating the gray walls of the castle as he strode at last into the castle yard.

A little group of retainers were talking eagerly. One of them came forward as the prince approached.

"Your highness, a knight with twenty men, is awaiting your pleasure in the town below."

"Do you know his name?" the prince asked briefly.

"He calls himself Baron Montigny, and says that he has come on a matter of pressing importance from Brussels."

The prince's expression did not change.

"Bring the baron and his men to the castle, and make arrangements for keeping them indefinitely."


Half an hour later, as FERIA clattered into the courtyard, it was the prince himself who came forward to meet him and set his immediate fears at rest by the warmth of his greeting.

(To be continued.)

A BUD OF SPRING.

BY GERTRUDE BEANE HAMILTON.

A SHORT STORY.

 HERE was no mistaking the clanging bell which heralded the yearly advent of the scissors-grinder. At the welcome sound, Mrs. Truax's voice issued sharply from the pantry.

"Here you, Clara Bell," she cried, "take this carving-knife and get the shears. Be quick, now. The money's in the clock."

Obedient, the slender, sweet-faced girl who had been washing dishes at the kitchen sink dried her hands and speedily departed upon her errand.

Clara Bell, as she waited on the edge of the board sidewalk, was surprised to perceive, in place of the bent form of the familiar grinder, a figure, tall and well built, which approached briskly at her call. The clothes of the stranger were a faded brown; but, despite his shabby appearance, he conveyed an impression of cleanliness.

His face was deeply tanned, and his beard half grown. Clara Bell concluded, however, that he must be quite young, and he was certainly very good-looking. As usual, the ringing of the bell had attracted several children. Two dogs were in attendance, one of whom barked vociferously at the fellow's heels.

The grinding of Mrs. Truax's utensils went merrily forward. Evidently, the stranger knew his business. Clara Bell's curiosity triumphed.

"You are a new one," she ventured.

The grinder held out the gleaming tool in self-defense.

"Ain't that ground A No. 1?" he demanded.

"Oh, I didn't mean that," returned the girl, abashed. "I meant, new to us. Here is your money."

There was a clinking of other coin as the grinder dropped the dimes into his pocket. Clara Bell wondered if it were really possible that a young man could be satisfied to make a mere living in this way. Somehow, to her, it indicated a woful lack of ambition. At this moment the grinder cleared his throat apologetically.

"You couldn't give a fellow a bite of dinner, could you?" he suggested.

Clara Bell's sensitive face turned scarlet. So he was also a beggar! She was keenly mortified for him; furthermore, she knew Mother Truax's manner of receiving tramps.

"I'll see," she rejoined without meeting his eyes, and fled into the house.

Mrs. Truax considered the proposition: she eyed with shrewd calculation the woodpile visible from her kitchen window.

"Fetch him in," she concluded.

When the stranger entered the kitchen, Mrs. Truax was ready for him.

"I'll give you a square meal," she declared. "if you'll pile wood, good and brisk, for half an hour after. You've ground and I've paid. Ain't no reason why I should throw in this dinner. You ain't sick and you ain't old. Will you pile?"

"I'll pile," agreed the man.

Then, in Clara Bell's tender heart, shame for him turned to pity. Surely this ready acquiescence must argue that the man could not earn enough with his grinding to buy his daily bread. There must be some inapparent weakness about the fellow, mental or physical, or he would not have chosen, in his youth, so listless or petty a vocation. She retired to the dining-room, there to ponder the situation.

After the stranger's hearty meal was over, Clara Bell was established by Mrs. Truax on the back stoop to time his work. The man had thrown aside his coat. The play of splendid neck and shoulder muscles was obvious through his flannel shirt. He was a fine specimen of masculine strength. Clara Bell's thoughts were increasingly busy.

She was eighteen years old to-day. It was plainly her duty to begin to live in earnest. The peculiar personality of this stranger unconsciously presented to her an immediate opportunity for home missionary work. When the half hour was nearly done, she went across the yard and seated herself deliberately on the edge of the wood-pile. After some hesitation, she addressed her charge, who, even at her approach, had not once looked up from the task he had undertaken.

"Are you a fugitive from justice?" she asked.

There was a convulsive movement of the man's broad shoulders, a sound stifled in his throat before he replied.

"Am I what?"

Clara Bell, graduate of a neighboring institute, simplified her language for the benefit of one evidently not so highly versed as herself in the English language.

"Have you done anything wrong?"

"Lots," admitted the man.

"And you're hiding under cover of this trade," concluded Clara Bell. "Was it so very wicked?" she pursued wistfully. "Isn't it possible for you to find employment more worthy of your splendid strength than grinding shears?"

"It's an honest trade, miss, and my machine's paid for," answered the man with some defiance.

"That may all be," returned Clara Bell gently, "but you look—you look—"

"How do I look?" demanded the perspiring laborer in sudden exasperation—"Like the fool that I am, I suppose."

There was a pained expression in Clara Bell's sweet blue eyes.

"I was about to say that you look capable and deserving of better things than scissors-grinding can offer you," she explained with injured dignity. She turned away, but the sound of the grinder's subdued voice arrested her.

"Excuse my being rough, miss," he

begged. "You're good and kind, but you ain't no idea what's brought me to this."

Clara Bell was quick to forgive.

"I only wanted to help you," she said.

"You can go now. Your time's up."

"Maybe I'll be coming this way some time again in better shape. Would you be glad?"

"I should be very glad," returned Clara Bell.

Her sweetly puzzled eyes met his. Slowly, at his admiring gaze, a conscious flush mounted in her cheeks. The young man started forward, then checked himself abruptly.

"Oh, darn!" he muttered.

This time Clara Bell did not look back. She was both grieved and alarmed. She hurried into the house, to watch from behind the parlor curtains the departure of this most unusual of scissors-grinders.

A half-hour later, Mrs. Truax rushed into Clara Bell's chamber, where the girl sat brushing her long, light hair, wondering meantime, with not a little humiliation, what it was in the stranger's eyes that had left her with a longing to look into them again.

"One of 'em's gone," cried Mrs. Truax distractedly, "and he's took it. No one else has had the chance. That's to pay me for letting tramps into my house when I know better. You go and set Constable Gillin after him, while I change my slippers. Be quick, now."

Clara Bell knew without question what was missing. Mrs. Truax, who had been but a poor servant before becoming the second wife of Clara Bell's father, valued none of her possessions so highly as the half-dozen silver teaspoons of fancy pattern, which she had purchased covetously one by one. No other loss could have so agitated her.

"Did you give him one to eat with?" asked Clara Bell, as she twisted up her hair.

"He helped himself. They was right before him. I was just such a forgetful fool as to leave 'em right there. He'll be getting away while you stand there haggling. Get after him now."

Clara Bell's first impulse was to openly rebel. Her second thought was wiser. Should she refuse, Mother Truax would

perform the errand herself, and that effectively.

For the first time in all her docile life, the girl deliberately planned to oppose her stepmother. By seeming acquiescence, she might be able to protect the man, warning him before she dutifully informed the constable against him.

Clara Bell almost ran down the street, questioning each child she met as to the whereabouts of the tall scissors-grinder.

11.

PRESENTLY she came within hearing of his bell. She was not long in overtaking him then. Flushed and breathless with haste, her eyes unnaturally bright and utterly forgetful of the boldness of her act, she caught the fellow by the arm and checked the deafening din of his bell.

"She is sending the constable after you," she cried. "She says you took her silver spoon. You can hire a team and get away. See, I have brought you two dollars. It was all I had. You can get the team at Slater's for a dollar and a half. Hurry; please do hurry."

There was a peculiar expression in the scissors-grinder's eyes as he refused her money. He met her anxious gaze fairly, with the reassurance of his own.

"I never took her spoon, and I won't run away," he declared.

"I know you didn't," Clara Bell passionately assured him: "but she's awful. She'll have you arrested, and they'll lock you up, and it may cost you all you've got to get free."

Clara Bell's knowledge of legal proceedings was slight.

"'Twon't cost me a cent," asserted the grinder obstinately. "Because I haven't the spoon. Anyway, what do you care?" And there was the look in his eyes again for which Clara Bell had longed, yet dared not fully meet.

"I care because I want you, some day, to have a nobler occupation," answered the girl bravely — "to succeed, to — to become your own equal. What a funny thing to say," broke off Clara Bell, "but it expresses just what I mean."

The scissors-grinder had opened his mouth to reply, when Clara Bell emitted a sharp cry.

"They're coming. She's found him

herself. Oh, you ought to have gone. You ought to have gone."

Down the street came a rapidly moving buggy which contained a man and woman. Mrs. Truax was pointing excitedly. The constable was lashing his horse. The scissors-grinder stood his ground. He only chided Clara Bell beneath his breath.

"Don't take on so," he said with a certain tenderness. "I'm all right."

"Here's your man!" cried Mrs. Truax. "Clara Bell, what you doing, talking to him? You go straight along home. I'll settle this business."

Constable Gillin laid a heavy hand on the young man's shoulder.

"I guess you'll have to go along with me," he said. "Unless you're willing to give up that spoon right here and now, and get out of town before you do any more mischief."

The young man accosted made no direct reply. He continued to address Clara Bell.

"You go along, as she says," he advised, adding, in an undertone: "I haven't any silver spoon, I tell you."

His tone carried comforting conviction, and Clara Bell did his bidding with surprising alacrity.

In the guard-room, Constable Gillin searched the scissors-grinder's clothing; then he undid the compact bundle which was strapped to the man's machine. Afterward he reported the result of his investigation to Mrs. Truax, who waited impatiently without.

"There's no sign of a silver spoon," he stated, "but there's suspicious-looking articles about him. For instance, in his bundle I found two pieces of jewelry — a gold ring and an opal stud — besides, two fine shirts and some real linen handkerchiefs. I rather guess I'll hold the fellow till morning. Meantime, we'll learn if any one has missed these things and keep him from housebreaking to-night."

It was at this moment that Clara Bell returned. She had searched everywhere at home for the missing spoon, instituting proceedings which had revolted her whole dainty self. She had fished the sink-spout with a bent wire until her patience was exhausted. She had investigated the contents of the refuse-can in the vain

hope that she herself had carelessly thrown out the teaspoon. But all to no purpose. Then she had again sought the scissors-grinder, hoping to bring him some aid. Aside, she received his rapid dictation.

"Send a telegram to Judge Van Horne, of Brunswick," he urged. "Say, 'Come at once. In jail. Innocent.' Sign it, 'Jack.' He'll fix it when he gets here; but it looks as if I'm doomed to spend the night in a cell," he chuckled sorrowfully.

Clara Bell hastened to do his bidding, but she was obliged to retire without the satisfaction of knowing whether a response of any kind reached the prisoner. Hopefully she conjectured that Judge Van Horne was an influential man for whom the scissors-grinder had some time worked, and through whose recommendation for honesty the young man would be set at liberty.

Early the following morning a judicial audience was granted the scissors-grinder and his accuser. Clara Bell was also present. Judge Kearn had but just asked the prisoner's name when into the court-room, waving a silver spoon high above her head for all to see, rushed a portly woman. With utter contempt of court, she spoke in a loud voice:

"Young man, you set down. You ain't no more guilty of taking this 'ere spoon than you are of eating your shirt. They can try me, if they wants to, but they ain't no business trying you."

A smile of individual character appeared on the face of each person in attendance. Judge Kearn spoke.

"Allow the woman to tell her story," he ordered.

"'Twas like unto this," explained Mrs. Hearst, voluble neighbor of Mrs. Truax. "You see, the anniversary of our sewing-circle—Mrs. Truax, foundress—is coming due next week. I'd been delegated to buy her a present wuth so much, and what to get I didn't know. So I happened in one day, just to quiz her a bit, and my eye lit on them spoons she'd been a polishing and was handling so lovingly. There wa'n't but a half-dozen. I knowed how proud and fond she was of 'em, and my mind was made up in a minute.

"I waits till she's gone out of the

room for something, and I goes to the holder and grabs one out and slips it inside my waist, just to match by, never thinking she'd be counting 'em again till next polishing time. So, now, the cat's out of the bag afore circle-time, but I couldn't see no other way to clear this young feller. I rushed over here just as soon as I heard on it. Now, I advise you to set the poor boy free. He looks honest."

Just here another visitor intruded upon the occupants of the court-room. Judge Van Horne nodded to Judge Kearn, then proceeded to lay a friendly hand upon the shoulder of the prisoner. There was a twinkle in his eye. He had been a jolly boy himself once.

"Don't you think you've had about enough of this masquerading, son?" he quizzed. "Maybe you'd make a better impression on the ladies present," and his quick glance rested significantly, for an instant, upon Clara Bell's charming face, "if you put on one of those white shirts and the black suit your mother sent along by me."

"The boys dared me at college," confessed young Van Horne, as he walked up the street with Clara Bell soon after his release. "I had overstudied, and was ordered off duty—an outdoor life and a new diet. That was the beginning. There are any amount of wagers up on me; but not one of them founded upon such implicit faith as you have shown in me. I say, you're a trump! I begged my dinner in order to see more of you. Out there by that wood-pile, I'd rather have lost all my bets than to have gone on deceiving you. And that two dollars!"

The young man's eager look estimated regretfully the defensive innocence of the face upturned to his, which was in expression like nothing so much as a sweet wild rose. Then warm impulse took Jack Van Horne by the wits and raced him headlong.

"I say, hurry and grow up, will you!" he urged tumultuously, and his eyes glistened.

Clara Bell's eyes met his, and the look held. Her fair forehead flushed slowly.

"Why, the idea! I grew up yesterday," she said with simple dignity and complete conviction.

THE MIDNIGHT OF PEACE.

BY ALEXANDER C. JOY.

A SHORT STORY.



LD Tai Ling, crooning and grunting over his *swan-pan* buttons, paid no heed to little Tai Moon as she danced through the hallways, and hummed the songs her mother had taught her. To him the coming of the great new year, which was to begin to-night with the stroke of twelve, had lost its joy with the passing of his youth. Now he observed the festal season merely as a part of his religion; and only fear of the devil, and respect for the sacred bones of his ancestors kept him in the straight and narrow path of duty.

In the year just passing, the great Joss had prospered his people, and the dollars gleaned from the vineyards, and the gardens, and the kitchens, had poured in a glittering stream over the *fan-tan* and *pi kau* tables of Tai Ling, honorable merchant. Many there were who lost, and borrowed, and lost again; and, though the borrowed coin clinked its way quickly back into Tai Ling's overflowing coffers, he even now muttered imprecations on himself as the sum of his unpaid loans piled its astounding total before him. Down through the ages, hallowed through its observance by his thousand forefathers, had come the unwritten law that the dawn of the new year must see all debts paid or canceled, all wrongs avenged or forgiven. The hour of midnight must usher in an era of good will and brotherly love.

During this last day of the old year, the merchants of San Francisco's Chinatown—and among them the owners of gambling-houses occupied a place of first importance—had met and publicly absolved those unfortunates whose debts were still unpaid: and Tai Ling, while

he had smiled benignly in the council each time he scratched a sum away, now grumbled to his heart's content in the privacy of his own home as his fingers clicked off the losses that were his to shoulder.

But while only rancor and sourness were in the heart of Tai Ling, in the heart of little Tai Moon was great gladness. Fifteen new years she had seen, and had welcomed each of them with the joyful anticipation of youth. The ceremonies had fascinated her; the constant feasting had been a source of delight: the popping firecrackers had been music to her ears.

Yet this new year meant more than a week of festivity and merrymaking. It was not with the ordinary feeling that she welcomed it, for Tai Moon was a woman now. To-night the Bing Tungs and the Suey Ons would be at peace, and to-morrow Fong Toy would seek her father, and in exchange for his gold carry her to his own house as his wife. Fong Toy was only waiting for the hour when he could buy.

Well did Tai Moon realize that Fong Toy was one of the bravest and most feared of the Suey Ons, and, therefore, the sworn enemy of her father and his tongsmen. Often had the rival tongsmen spilled one another's blood, and more than once had Tai Moon stuck her fingers in her ears to shut out the sound of pistol-shots and the shrieks of death. Of the merits of the quarrels she knew little: she only knew that Fong Toy had talked to her of love; talked in low, sweet tones, and in language that was music to her ears. This love of which he spoke other men did not know, nor other women. But Fong Toy was not like other men—and she was not like

other women, for had not Fong Toy told her so?

Perhaps it was at the mission, where he had learned his English, and many other things which his more ignorant fellows did not know, that he had found out about this wonderful love. Tai Moon did not know. She only knew that she thought of Fong Toy every hour of her waking; that she dreamed of him by night; that her heart thumped rapidly against her breast when she saw him; that in all her life her every other joy was as nothing compared to her present happiness in Fong Toy.

And to-morrow Fong Toy would claim her. Then she could laugh at the hated Sing Duck, who always talked to her as though he owned her; who wanted her not as a wife, but as a slave. Since she could remember she had abhorred this big, cruel man, the most vicious member of her father's tong, feared by all, even the members of his own society. Awful tales were told of Sing Duck, too; but only suspicion ever pointed to him as the murderous knife-wielder who jumped from dark corners, and plunged a knife into an unsuspecting victim's back. Sing Duck had told her that some day he should carry her off to his home; and her father had smiled, and said it should be so.

But to-morrow— Tai Moon laughed. She had nothing more to fear. To-morrow she would be bought by Fong Toy; for Fong Toy had wealth, and her father could never withstand the temptation of a heap of gold. And, besides, her father, always for peace, would be quick to recognize the possibilities of an alliance between his daughter and the young Suey On leader.

II.

PEEPING through the narrow slit of the half-open door, Tai Moon could see her lover standing sentinel in front of the Sun T'ue Lee gambling-house. Big, strong, alert, ever watchful, he was the best lookout on this narrow street where every other door opened into a *fan-tan* or lottery-house in which iron doors and heavy barricades, with a diligent, quick-witted sentinel standing guard at the entrance, were the only assurance of business success.

Many a time had Tai Moon, peeping through the door in just this fashion, seen a squad of policemen rush around a corner and swoop suddenly upon a lookout, breaking past him into the house, and suspending business in that particular place for the rest of the night. Or, perhaps, they found themselves shut out by the sudden slamming of the great iron doors, and would have to retreat, sullen and baffled. It was all like a great game to Tai Moon, and she thought with pride that these fat, blue-coated white men had never yet been able to get past the doors of the Sun T'ue Lee house while Fong Toy was on guard.

To-night the street thronged with life. From every village and farm the Chinese had flocked for the great festal week. The burning of punk filled the air with an odor pleasing to Chinese nostrils. From every awning, and over every door hung beautiful, glowing lanterns—red, and gold, and yellow—casting fantastic shadows on the hurrying, busy throng that shuffled through the streets, and in and out of the doorways and alleys. Lending a holiday tint to the ordinarily dull coloring of the thoroughfare, prayers to the gods of the households loomed in great black characters, startlingly distinct, against the flaring red background of hundreds of huge posters that decorated the blank walls. Already the feeling of good-fellowship was in the air. The chatter of happy voices buzzed in accompaniment to the clatter of commerce and the noise of shuffling feet, and above it all there rose often the cheerful greeting of the season: "*Tong ye fah toy*"—May you prosper forever.

Tai Moon saw nothing but the tall form of Fong Toy, silhouetted against the brilliantly lighted entrance to the gambling-house. She was only dimly conscious of the unwonted noise which always hitherto had been a delight to her childish ears. An uproar in the street was followed by a thunderclap of slamming doors from one end of it to the other, and a policeman, baffled in an attempt to rush past one of the sentries, strode through the momentarily hushed throng, glorying in the knowledge that while he was near all business in the gambling-houses must, of necessity, cease.

Even this bit of excitement did not rouse old Tai Ling from his disconsolate reverie and, taking advantage of his preoccupation, Tai Moon slipped through the door into the shadow of a narrow alley adjoining her father's house, and opening upon the street. Almost instantly Fong Toy, driven from his post of duty by the attempted raid, was at her side.

"I believed you would be here," he said. "These police-devils are useful in a way. But for them, sweet daughter of the flowers, I might still be on guard instead of standing by your side."

"I have been here but a moment," she answered. "My honorable father is busy with his accounts, and heard not my going."

He drew her deeper into the shadow of the passageway.

"The hour has just turned ten," he whispered. "It is but two hours—" He paused.

"I know," she replied. "I have watched the hour-glass, and I am happy. It is but two hours till the new year."

"Only two hours," he repeated. "And then I shall go to the worthy Tai Ling on a mission of peace, seeking his daughter for my wife. Tell me, you no longer have fear of Sing Duck?"

"Why should I?" she merrily laughed back. "Have you not told me I am your chosen one? And has not my lily prospered, and are not its petals big, and firm, and beautiful, an augury for my happiness?"

"That is well, for my own lily was feeble. It droops on its stalk, and its petals have never blossomed. But," he motioned reassuringly as a little cry came to her lips, "there is another lily I have watched with jealous, loving eyes, and that has grown in beauty day by day. What are the lifeless blossoms of the sacred plant to me when I have you to look upon? What harm can befall me through the wilting of a mere flower, if you, queen of the whole great garden of flowers, but wish me well?"

"You talk in language that is strange," she sighed, "but it is sweet."

"Listen," he went on, clasping her hands in his own. "I am not like other men of my race. In my childhood's days when at the mission-school I learned the

white man's language; I learned also the white man's love. I have read the beautiful tales of hearts that beat only for each other, and it is with the love of the white man, never dying, sweeter than life itself, that I love you, child of Tai Ling."

"I know nothing of this strange love," she sighed, "but if it means that when I am with you I am thrilled with a happiness such as I have never known before, and that when we are apart my every thought and wish is for you, then, Fong Toy, I love."

He drew her to him and kissed her—the first kiss of her life; and she shook for very joy at the touch of his lips.

"You had better return to your father's house," he said at last. "To-morrow I shall see him. He will not refuse, for I am rich and powerful. I am through with duty for to-night, and I shall make ready for the new year."

III.

As quietly as he had come, he slipped into the crowd and was gone. Tai Moon tried to follow him with her eyes; but before he had vanished from her sight she was grasped roughly by the shoulder, and, startled, she turned to gaze into the leering features of Sing Duck. Instinctively she drew away from him, bent upon flight; but his hold was sure, and he rudely jerked her back into the dark alleyway. Vainly she essayed to scream: her voice, through very fright, had deserted her.

"So!" he grunted. "the daughter of Tai Ling meets her father's enemy in secret, and listens to foolish talk of love, eh?"

He had heard it all, she realized, and her knees trembled beneath her while her heart fluttered in terror.

"To-morrow he would buy you, would he?" Sing Duck went on. "The toad! I tell you this—the illustrious Tai Ling, your father, long ago promised you to me, and mine you shall be. You say you do not fear me. You shall tell a different story soon. You shall be like the dog, cringing at my feet, doing as I command, as any slave obeys her master. Do you hear?"

He shook her brutally.

"And he? Pah! He talks of to-

morrow. He will never see to-morrow's dawn. In the sacred councils of the Bing Tungs it has been so decreed, and before another hour this man who has prated of his love and his gold shall die by my hand. Back to your father's house, girl! To-morrow I shall claim you—and Fong Toy will be dead!"

Blindly, numbly, Tai Moon groped her way to the door, and into the narrow hallway. Feeling her way to her own little room, she sank upon the mat. For many minutes—to her it seemed hours—she lay very still, as one unconscious. Then suddenly she awoke; her numbness was over; she was possessed by one startling thought, that Fong Toy was in danger. His life was threatened.

In an instant she was on her feet. Even now, while she stood there inactive, Sing Duck might be creeping upon him, ready to thrust a knife into his ribs. If he was to be saved, she alone must do it. Her fright was gone now. The blood of a thousand generations of Bing Tungs flowed through her veins, and now it was afire. Quickly she crept by her father, and was in the street again. Here and there she sped with feet that fairly flew. No one in the great throng of merry-makers heeded her.

Into all of Fong Toy's favorite haunts she rushed. Now she hurried through an underground tunnel; now into a vile-smelling opium-den; now into a store reeking with incense and burning punk; and as the despair in her heart grew greater the blood in her veins coursed the more fiercely.

She had a dull foreboding that she would be too late; and the prophecy of the blossomless lily recurred to her again and again. Turning at last into a narrow passageway leading to the Sun Tse Lee house, she stumbled over a prostrate body, and knew that she had found him. To make sure she felt for the snake-ring he wore upon his hand. Face downward he lay. The body was still warm, and only a few minutes had elapsed since, full of life, and strength, and happiness, he had fallen a victim to the hatred of Sing Duck.

Tai Moon felt for the knife. She knew it would be sticking in his back, for the Chinese assassin never pulls a knife from the body of his victim. Su-

perstition has it that if the knife is withdrawn the soul of the dead will come through the gaping wound and haunt the murderer till his reason flees.

But the soul of Fong Toy had no terrors for Tai Moon. Firmly she grasped the knife-hilt, and carefully, tenderly withdrew the blade. It still dripped with the life-blood of the man she loved.

Quickly then she turned and fled, the knife, gripped in her hand, concealed in the folds of her loose blouse. Into the light of the alley she darted, looking, searching, watching just as she had done before. Her haste was frenzied; she did not stop to ask questions, but merely searched, and searched, and searched.

Minutes flew by. Finally she found herself in the little passageway where less than two hours ago big, strong Fong Toy had told her of his wonderful love. She stopped, deep in the shadow, peering into the street where the crowd had diminished, and the noise and bustle of shuffling feet and clattering tongues had died away.

And then she saw him—Sing Duck. He was not more than fifty yards away, and was approaching so slowly it seemed to her that he moved by inches. Once he seemed about to cross to the opposite side of the street, and Tai Moon grasped the knife more firmly. But he kept on, straight toward her. Now he was but twenty feet away; now ten.

Tai Moon crouched low against the wall. Sing Duck came abreast of her. Silently, stealthily she stepped behind him, and drove the knife into his back. Sing Duck staggered, groaned, and then tumbled back into the passageway. Tai Moon could feel his body quivering at her feet for a moment; then it was still—still as the body of Fong Toy, lying in the blackness of that other passageway.

From a thousand throats a sudden shout arose. A whistle shrieked loudly, and was followed by the din of tom-toms, gongs, and squeaking fifes and fiddles. The streets and alleys roared with popping firecrackers.

Blindly, numbly, Tai Moon once more groped her way to her father's door. Old Tai Ling met her at the steps.

"Listen, child," he said. "Do you not hear the revelry? The midnight of peace is at hand."

AN AMERICAN KNIGHT ERRANT.*

BY EDWARD BEDINGER MITCHELL.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

RONALD LAMPTON has inherited with his uncle's fortune the guardianship of Doris Revere. Seated in a Paris café, Lampton is reading a letter from Doris, announcing her departure from the convent.

He remarks two rough-looking men spying on a stranger of distinguished air. A pedler of matches approaches the stranger and whispers a few words. The stranger leaves the café. He is followed by the two rough-looking men, whom Lampton in turn follows. In a dark archway the stranger is attacked. Lampton helps him drive the ruffians off.

From the house before which the fight took place the stranger summons Dr. Cleon Menon. The doctor introduces the stranger as Michael Kara, and requests Lampton to harbor him while he is recovering from his wound.


Tom Rawlins, a New York friend of Lampton's, calls and takes Lampton to dinner. In the restaurant they defend a woman who has been struck by her escort, whom they expel from the place. They take her home, and learn she is Mme. Julie Lecompte. As they are about to get into the carriage with her, the match-pedler who warned Kara slips a box of matches into Lampton's hand. On the box Lampton sees written: "*Danger!*" At Mme. Lecompte's, Rawlins chatters of Michael Kara. Lampton notices an odd look in her eyes as Kara's name is mentioned. Smoking a cigarette of Mme. Lecompte's, Lampton loses consciousness. When he recovers, he is being taken home by Rawlins. He discovers that the letter from Doris Revere has been taken from his pocket.

Next morning the police call on Lampton with a warrant for Kara's arrest. Kara escapes by jumping through the window, dropping a ring as he does so. He calls to Lampton to get the ring.

Failing to trace Kara, Lampton wears the ring, and returns to New York. He takes Doris from the convent and puts her under the chaperonage of Mrs. John Courland, his cousin. At a reception the Levantine envoy tries to take from Doris a large emerald pendant, graven with three strange characters. Lampton knocks him down. Soon an unsuccessful attempt is made to kidnap Doris by men who come to the house, posing as oriental rug-sellers. On her way to a dance with Lampton their automobile almost runs down a Levantine pedler. A mob of his compatriots storm the car. When the police have cleared them away, Lampton discovers to his horror that Doris has vanished.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SIGN OF THE RING.

HE detective flicked the ash from his cigar and squirmed uneasily in his chair.

"We have done all we could, Mr. Lampton," he said. "I am sorry to have to report that there is absolutely no clue on which to work. We always tell our client the exact truth. In this case the truth is that we are exactly where we started—utterly in the dark."

Eight days had passed since the fatal night when Doris had so mysteriously

vanished from the automobile. Of my suffering in that time there is no need to tell, nor indeed would I be willing to do so. On that period of agony I never allowed my mind to dwell.

Eight days had passed, and there had been no word from Doris, no clue, as the detective said, on which to work. In some strange way, while Rawlins and I were fighting with the pushcart men and wrangling with the policemen, the night had swallowed her. That was all we knew at the time, and that was all we knew a week afterward.

I had offered a reward, a large reward. The reward had no other result than a few visits from transparent liars.

* This story began in *THE CAVALIER* for February.

The machinery of the regular police was in motion, or supposed to be. The entire unofficial corps of newspaper detectives was hard at work upon the great Lampton-Revere mystery. The best private detective agency in the city had assigned its ablest men to the case.

Now Jennings had come for the tenth time to tell me that all had been useless. My heart was sick within me as I listened.

"You may be right," he went on. "The riot may have been part of a plan, but I ask you this, Mr. Lampton—who has the money or the time to get up such things as that, and what sort of a gang is it in which not one man is tempted by such a reward as you have offered?"

"You talk of Kalat Bey. You even asked the State Department to take up the matter. You didn't seriously expect them to, did you? All that you have against him is that he was impertinent to a pretty girl. Good Heavens, man! If the State Department undertook to punish every diplomat who did that, we'd be in a pretty mess, wouldn't we?"

"No, no, Mr. Lampton. We'll keep on shadowing Kalat if you say so, but here's the truth—somebody in the crowd saw that necklace. What happened then, well?"—he shrugged his shoulders—"there's chloroform, you know."

"Why didn't they take the necklace, then?" I asked. "There was no need, I assure you, to take Miss Revere, too, to get that."

The detective looked at me in silence for a moment. Then he flicked his cigar ash once more and glanced away. Obviously he was debating whether or not to speak what was in his mind.

"Go on, man!" I cried impatiently. "What is it?"

Jennings hesitated an instant longer before he took the bull by the horns.

"Did it ever occur to you, Mr. Lampton," he said, "that Miss Revere might have gone of her own accord? She was a young girl, and girls sometimes have—er—romances which—"

I brought my fist down on the table with a crash which made him jump in his seat.

"Nonsense! No more of that! It is utterly impossible, and we will not discuss the question."

The detective suppressed a smile as he rose to his feet.

"As you please, Mr. Lampton. It is only a theory, of course, and we will abandon it if you wish. Good day, sir."

An hour longer I remained in the library, the prey of abject despair. Everything that could be done had been done. There was nothing left, it seemed, but to sit and suffer. Unless the age of miracles were to return for my especial benefit, that was to be my lot through life.

As I sat there hopeless, Mrs. Courland entered. Even my own misery could not shut my eyes to the change which had come over her. Once I had attempted to reason with her, but without effect. Every moment of the day and night, in unreasoning grief, she reproached herself for having permitted Doris to go without her.

But now, as she came into the room, her worn face bore a faint gleam of hope.

"Here is a letter, Ronald," she said, handing me a dirty, crumpled envelope with my name scrawled across it, and waiting in pathetic expectation while I tore the missive open. "The boy from the little bakery on Sixth Avenue brought it to the kitchen door."

The sheet of greasy brown paper I unfolded bore neither address nor signature, nothing but the one line, laboriously printed in pencil in large letters:

CORNER THIRTY-EIGHTH STREET
AND PARK AVENUE, TEN
TO-NIGHT.

I held the uncouth message out to Mrs. John.

"Take your revolver, Ronald," was all she said when she had deciphered the scrawl.

Reason fought hard with hope that evening as I walked slowly up Fifth Avenue. I had little confidence that good would spring from a clandestine meeting with an illiterate unknown. In all probability it was a mere hoax, arranged by some individual whose perverted sense of humor found delight in the sufferings of others. At best it was only another mystery, and of mysteries I had had more than enough. Still, nothing could be worse than the dead blank of the past week. If it was a trap, whoever had set it was welcome to his victim.

The rendezvous was deserted when I reached it, a full fifteen minutes before the appointed time. It is always a quiet neighborhood, and that night a keen wind, whipping out of the northwest, had swept the streets clean of loiterers. My unknown friend or enemy had chosen his place well.

I lighted a cigar, turned up my collar and strolled about the four corners, one hand resting on the revolver in my overcoat-pocket, the night stick tucked under my arm. The few persons I encountered hurried by, bestowing no more than a passing glance upon me.

At the head of the avenue the hands of the great clock in the tower of the Grand Central Station crawled slowly forward. They had passed ten when a man emerged from the stairway leading down to car-tracks below the street.

He stepped into the surrounding obscurity so quickly I had barely time to see that he was short and roughly dressed. He did not go far, however, for I could distinguish his form, standing on the sidewalk in the shadows.

Strolling across the street, puffing with elaborate carelessness at my cigar, I came to a halt in front of him. For a moment we studied each other there on the quiet, wind-swept avenue.

Then he moved nearer to me and spoke:

"Mr. Ronald Lampton, yes?"

The familiar words had a foreign ring as he uttered them, an accent which it seemed I had already heard, but could not place. Even at close range, I could distinguish little more than a swarthy, weather-beaten face above the stocky figure. What I saw, however, did not appear forbidding, and the grip upon the butt of my revolver relaxed.

"Yes," I answered. "My name is Lampton. Who are you?"

He glanced nervously about him and came still closer.

"You got my note, then? The boy, I paid him, but boys are bad."

"I got a note," I said. "What is it?"

The man was frightened, of that there was no doubt, and my heart leaped high with hope. Was this the weak spot in the fortress of my unknown enemies? My reward was large—was this man about to betray his gang?

"I only heard yesterday. I do not know you, but you have the ring, so I came to tell you what I know."

"Tell me what? What ring? For Heaven's sake, speak, man!"

In the agony of my suspense I raised my voice until the words rang through the silent streets. The fellow jumped as though I had hit him.

"Lower, lower! Will you kill me?"

He spoke in a hoarse whisper, his frightened eyes roving in all directions in search of hidden danger. In a panic lest his terror overcome his greed at the last moment, I thrust my hand into my pocket and pulled out a roll of bills.

"If it's money you want," I said, holding it out to him, "take this. There will be more to come if you tell me the truth. Where is she?"

The man snatched the roll from my hand, threw it in the gutter and spat upon it.

"A curse upon your money," he cried, and this time it was his voice that rose. "Am I a Judas? I serve the ring—not gold."

Suddenly, while I stared at him dumfounded, his manner changed. Fear and anger left him together and he spoke humbly, as if in the presence of one immeasurably above him.

"Listen, sir. You have the ring, therefore I tell you. I came into port yesterday. I can read a little, yes; and I read in the paper of the Lampton mystery they call it, and I say to myself, that is Mr. Ronald Lampton who has the ring. I saw it on the steamer and the steward told me he was Mr. Lampton. Then I go to see a girl I knew in the old country across the sea, and she says: 'They are at it again. I am sick of them. And this time it is a lady, so lovely.'"

He stopped abruptly. Apparently his story was at end.

"Go on, man," I cried, wild with excitement. "Go on, what then?"

"That is all," he said. "She tells me no more. But I think, and think, and then I say: 'Mr. Lampton has the ring, and Mr. Lampton has lost a lady. I must help him.' I think perhaps the house is watched, so I send the note."

Somchow I managed to pull myself together and speak quietly.

"You did right, and like a good man. Where is the girl who told you?"

"She is in Albany Street, in number nine. But, sir, I beg you do not ask for her. You would kill her. And go not alone. The place is evil—there are evil men there. Perhaps she helps you, perhaps not. I cannot say. I tell you what I know."

I stooped down and picked the scorned roll of bills from the gutter.

"You had better take this," I said. "I know that you serve the ring, but this may help you and the girl. Come to me when you want more. Who are you, and what is your name?"

This time the man pocketed the money with a gesture of deference.

"It is as your excellency wishes," he said. "I am called Paul Benoukan, and I am quartermaster on the Virginia."

As he spoke I noticed for the first time the small gold rings in his ears. At the same moment I knew where I had heard that strange accent. I saw the tossing deck of the steamer, the quartermaster bowing low before me, the officer roaring at him, and then the deck-steward pointing me out to the sailor.

Providence had sent this man into port to furnish me with the clue that police, detectives, and reporters had sought in vain. What he meant by all his talk of the ring I neither knew nor cared. He had given me a clue—I would follow it.

CHAPTER XIV.

A REAPPEARANCE.

AN hour later Tom Rawlins and I stood in Albany Street, gazing up at the closed shutters of a tumble-down frame house, above the door of which we could just distinguish the figure nine.

I had taken Benoukan's advice and telephoned to Tom. What the boy lacked in discretion he made up in grit. I had seen him fight, and I wanted no better comrade in a tight place.

Moreover, it would have cheered any man to see the joy on his face when he met me. Like Mrs. Courland, he had never ceased to reproach himself for his

share in the disaster, entirely forgetting that a week before it was he alone who had rescued Doris.

Although there was nothing in the world that he could do to help me, he had braved the wrath of his family, and flatly refused to return to college until Doris should be found. Now he felt that he was about to reap his reward. For the first time in eight days I smiled when I saw his set jaw and clenched fist.

But the wild hope that had for a few moments surged within us died almost to nothingness as we stood before the silent, dark building. Somewhere within was the unknown girl on whom all our hopes rested. But how were we to reach her? And when we had, would she tell us what she knew?

It was a three-story structure that we studied—or rather two stories and a half, for on the top floor the small, unshuttered, unwashed windows, with panes of glass missing here and there, did not indicate that the little space under the sloping roof was habitable.

From the sign swinging over the door, a few steps below the street level, I gathered that the ground floor was used as a cheap Greek restaurant. Otherwise, there was nothing to distinguish No. 9 from the other antiquated, unkempt buildings which flanked it on either side.

We were in the heart of the Greek or Syrian quarter, south of Fulton Street and west of Broadway, in one of those obscure colonies of aliens which lie tucked away in the center of New York's commerce. Apparently the denizens of this particular settlement were hard workers, who rose early and retired early. Although it was a little before eleven there was no sign of life on either side of the street.

But, for all I knew, there might be watchers at any one of the dark windows above us, and our presence would only serve to put them on their guard. Sick with the pain of disappointment, I turned to Rawlins.

"We can do nothing now. We'll breakfast in that restaurant," I said.

With some idea of posing as casual passers-by, we marched on down the street, Tom whistling bravely and I swinging my stick.

A policeman, standing in the friendly shelter of an archway, eyed us as we passed. Albany Street on a cold, winter night was hardly the place gentlemen ordinarily selected for an evening stroll. But he let us pass without question and we made our way in silence to Washington Square.

At half past seven the next morning, Rawlins and I again turned into Albany Street. The few hours' interval had transformed that byway. The rickety shutters of the houses were flung open, trucks and wagons of every description rattled over the cobblestones. The narrow sidewalks were crowded with hurrying workers.

In the restaurant on the ground floor of No. 9, however, the morning rush was already over, as I had calculated that it would be. A few belated customers were still busy over their coffee and coarse bread at the long tables in the front room. They had no time for us.

On the other hand, the proprietor, a burly fellow with a three days' beard on his chin, his shirt-sleeves rolled up, and a greasy napkin tied about his waist, was all smiles. Doubtless he had heard of other dingy little eating-shops which had risen to the distinction of "bohemian restaurants" and brought upon the lucky heads of their proprietors a shower of gold from curiosity-seekers. In us he may have seen the first of the wealthy patrons who were to spread his fame throughout the city.

I could have wished, however, that his attentions had been less. Insisting that the common tables of the main room were not for such as us, despite our protests he forced us into a tiny apartment in the rear, separated from the other by a flimsy screen and a curtain of long service.

Through the crusted dirt of the window-panes the wall of the adjoining house was visible, some six feet away, and that was all. In the room itself the only objects to attract the eye were the stains upon the faded wall-paper and a battered lithograph of Washington crossing the Delaware.

Afraid to attract undue attention, we did not dare to resist. Inwardly cursing his zeal, we seated ourselves at the only table and awaited the proprietor's further

pleasure. With a flourish, he pulled the napkin from his waist and spread it as a table-cloth upon the comparatively clean oilcloth cover. Then, with head cocked forward in ludicrous imitation of a real waiter receiving an order, he stood expectantly by.

At any other time, I think I should either have laughed in the man's face or left in disgust. As it was, with my whole life's happiness at stake, I had neither taste for humor nor thought of clean linen. I was playing a part, but I had no interest in the stage setting.

"We are hungry," I said to the proprietor, "and I hear that the Greeks are good cooks."

Beaming with pleasure at the compliment, the fellow shrugged his shoulders and spread his hands in front of him.

"Perhaps. Some think so. What would the gentlemen like?"

"Oh," I said, "that we leave to you. Then I am certain we will fare well. But remember, we wish to try something distinctive, something not to be had in every restaurant."

The man scratched his head, gazing at the floor in profound meditation for a minute or two. Then he looked up with an air of decision.

"First there will be figs as only the Athenians eat them, then—"

He named a series of dishes, the titles of which I never knew. Of their character I can recall nothing save the fact that they were all greasy and most of them nasty.

He had started on his way to the kitchen when I called him back.

"It is early," I said, "but we are tired. Have you none of the true Greek wine?"

The proprietor regarded me doubtfully. On the one hand was the certainty of a tremendous profit on the wine, on the other a small risk. I saw the greed in his eyes and knew before he spoke what the answer would be.

"The gentleman sees I have not the license, but perhaps—"

"Pshaw, man," I interrupted, "do you take us for detectives? Your regular customers—they do not always drink coffee."

A broad grin spread over the unshaven face of the proprietor as he departed to

fetch the wine and prepare the repast. Left to ourselves at last, Rawlins and I sat in silence for some moments.

Then Tom leaned across the table speaking, with unusual prudence, in a low voice:

"There's nothing here but a lot of blamed dagoes, no girl at all. Besides, you say you were drugged in Paris. Why shouldn't this fellow slip something into the truck he's gone to get?"

"Very likely he will," I snapped, "but I stay here as long as I can. If you are scared, get out."

It was a brutal insult, and uncalled for. My only excuse is that eight days of torture had left me scarcely knowing what I said or did. Nevertheless, I still had sense enough to be sorry the instant the words were out of my mouth.

Tom's face flushed and he glared at me savagely. But he had more self-control than I, for he choked back the angry retort which trembled on his lips.

"You don't mean that, Ronald," was all he said.

Thereafter we remained in gloomy silence, facing each other across the dirty napkin.

We were sitting thus when Rawlins straightened up with a violent start. At the same moment the curtain rustled behind my back.

Following the direction of Tom's eyes, I wheeled about in my chair. Just within the room, bearing a tray with a bottle of wine and glasses, was a young girl.

She could not have been more than eighteen, the age when the women of the Mediterranean are at their best. Even in the first startled glance I threw at her, I realized that she was beautiful, and, further, that she was well aware of it.

She stood in the doorway for no reason that I know of, unless it was that we might have an opportunity to look at her. Her smile revealed two even rows of white teeth, set off by the olive tint of her clear skin. The mass of black hair above was crossed in front by a narrow blue ribbon like a classic fillet, and adorned with two blue and white rosettes. Another blue ribbon was fastened about her slender waist and a pale-blue scarf was flung over her shoulders, more for effect than warmth. A pair of patent leather

shoes gave the last touch to this striking picture of a newly made American.

These details she gave us ample time to observe, and as I studied her, hope sprang again within me, and I prayed that this might be the girl of whom Benoukan had told me. Despite her air of coquetry, the face was both intelligent and kind. Surely it was not as an accomplice that this girl knew of the plot against Doris.

"*Ecco*, the wine!" she cried, advancing to the table and depositing the tray upon its edge. "May you enjoy it!"

"Since you have brought it, it must be good," I answered, stretching out my hand to take the heavy bottle.

Tray, bottle, and glasses crashed to the floor as the girl sprang back with wide-open eyes, staring at my hand.

"The ring!" she breathed so low that I could scarcely catch the startled words. "The ring! You are mad to come here!"

For a brief instant I half believed I was mad, or would be soon. The whole world seemed made of mysteries and my brain was dizzy with vain gropings for the key. But I had come prepared for surprises. While the girl still stared at me, I recovered from my own astonishment.

"I am not mad," I said, leaning toward her. "I came here to talk with you."

The advent of the burly proprietor, brought in haste from the kitchen by the noise of breaking glass, cut me short.

At the wreck upon the floor, he threw up his hands in consternation.

"A thousand pigs! The finest wine in all Greece! Have you done this, clumsy limb of folly?" turning in wrath upon the unfortunate girl.

"No, no!" I cried, hastening to her rescue. "I did it myself. It is no matter. I must pay for my stupidity, I suppose. Let us have another bottle."

The prospect of charging an extortionate price for two bottles instead of one cleared the man's face like magic. With a hundred apologies for the delay, he despatched the girl for a broom and more glasses, and at length, much to my relief, betook himself once more to the kitchen.

A minute later the girl reappeared

with a fresh bottle and glasses. As she deposited them on the table, she leaned over me, her eyes shining with excitement.

"Take it off, sir," she whispered. "They will kill you if they see it."

I glanced down at my hands. Jewelry of any sort on a man I had always detested. Until the day when I left Paris my fingers had been guiltless of adornment. Now I saw upon my right hand the seal-ring I had in keeping for my vanished friend, Michael Kara.

What it had to do with my lost ward I had no leisure to imagine, but it had given me the only clue we possessed. It had served me well once; it might do so again.

"No," I whispered back, "I will not take it off, but I will turn it so." I twisted the ring on my finger until the seal of St. Michael and the dragon was on the inside of my hand, concealed from casual eyes. "Now tell me," I gazed straight into the girl's eyes. "Where is she?"

The dark flush died in her cheeks.

"Whom do you mean?" she breathed.

"Who are you? Why should I tell you?"

I rose from the table and laid both hands upon her trembling shoulders.

"I am Ronald Lampton," I said, slowly and distinctly, "and I love her. You will tell me because you have no heart for wickedness and because I wear the ring."

Like one fascinated, the girl gazed at me in silence. Never before, I fancy, in the course of her simple life, had she been made to face so difficult a problem. At last her eyes dropped and she gave a little shudder.

"They are my own people," she said. "They are bad, but I cannot betray them."

"Tell me where she is," I repeated. "Give me back Doris, and your people will not suffer."

She had opened her mouth to answer when the heavy step of the proprietor sounded beyond the screen. With a wrench she freed herself from my grasp, snatched up her broom as it was hard at work upon the broken glass when the man came in with the first of his atrocious dishes.

How we contrived to make away with that meal, I do not know. At the first opportunity, the girl slipped from the room, leaving us alone with the food we had ordered. From time to time the proprietor appeared with a fresh mess, but of the girl we saw nothing. There were but two things for us to do—to eat and wait.

At last the end came. While I complimented the owner of the place upon the excellence of his cooking, Rawlins lighted a cigarette with a sigh of relief and settled back in his chair.

"By Heavens, what stuff!" he murmured as the fellow disappeared to calculate how much he could safely charge us. "Praise be, we're through with it. What next, Ronald?"

Another man than I answered his question. From the front room, empty now for some little while, came a shrill call.

"Lalla! Lalla! Come here!"

It was the voice of the wizened pedler of rugs who had drugged me in my own smoking-room.

CHAPTER XV.

A STRANGE PURSUIT.

AT the sound my blood boiled with rage. Involuntarily I jumped from my chair and started for the doorway, my fists clenched. Half way there, I came to a dead stop.

Very probably I could capture the scoundrel, but what then? There would be one less villain at large in the world, but I would not have Doris. Long before the fellow could be induced to confess, his gang would take the alarm and be off with their booty.

"They are my own people," the girl had declared. If I fell upon one of them now, I could expect no help from her hereafter.

Tiptoeing back to the table, I resumed my seat. "The rug-man," I whispered in answer to Tom's look of blank wonder. "Keep quiet and listen."

"Lalla! Lalla!" called the old man again.

This time the girl must have obeyed the summons, for her clear voice cut short a torrent of words in some dialect of which I could make nothing.

"Oh, speak English," she cried impatiently. "I've forgotten that stuff. We're in America now."

The rug merchant burst into another flood of angry gibberish, only to be unceremoniously interrupted again.

"Speak English, I tell you," repeated Lalla. "or else keep still. I won't listen to your other nonsense."

I could have shouted with joy. The girl wished us to hear. There could be no other reason for her insolent insistence. The old man yielded with bad grace.

"What fool's business is this?" he growled. "But you'll pay for it soon enough. I'll teach you, for all your American airs. Now, tell me—"

His voice sank to a squeaking whisper and I could distinguish nothing of what he said. When he stopped, Lalla laughed in scorn.

"What an old idiot it is! Of course Nikola served them. He thinks his fortune is made. They ate like pigs and paid like fools."

"That calf's head make a fortune!" cried the merchant. "Let him keep to his pots and pans. Have they gone?"

The arrival of the third person saved the girl from the necessity of an answer. Though I could not understand the language, the newcomer was probably an individual of some importance, for he spoke to the old villain brusquely and without ceremony, apparently issuing instructions which were punctuated by an occasional syllable of acquiescence from the pedler.

Then the old man took up the burden of the conversation. In the exclamation with which the stranger greeted his first few sentences, I read anger and condemnation, but thereafter he heard the merchant through without interruption. For a few moments after the pedler's voice ceased there was silence in the restaurant while the statement which had just been delivered was mentally digested. A few terse orders followed and then we heard the pedler's voice raised again.

"Lalla! Lalla!" he called.

From somewhere in the building the girl answered him. A minute or two later, the rustle of skirts and the halting step of the old man moving across the

floor in the direction of the door told us that the newcomer had sent the strangely assorted couple forth on some errand.

With their departure quiet reigned in the front room once more, while in the rear Rawlins and I continued to sit in silence at our table. There was nothing else for us to do. Our one hope was the girl, Lalla. Until she returned we were helpless. Moreover, it was evident that in this shabby eating-shop we were close to the headquarters of the mysterious gang we were tracking. If we were permitted to remain undisturbed there was a fair chance of acquiring valuable information.

But we were not permitted. A chair was pushed back in the front room, and an instant later a young man lounged carelessly in upon us. Strolling over to the window, he glanced casually out of it, then wheeled about and surveyed us with languid eyes.

Under other circumstances I might have resented the impertinence of his inspection. Unquestionably we were a curious pair to come upon in the back-room of a dirty little restaurant, but his own presence there was no less extraordinary.

From the crown of his derby hat to the soles of his well-blackened shoes his clothes were perfect. Between his gloved fingers he held a cigarette. Altogether, he would have seemed more in place in the show-window of a Fifth Avenue tailor than he did in the obscure den in which we found him.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he said, when he had completed to his satisfaction his examination of us. "This is a beastly hole, isn't it?"

He spoke with the peculiar accent of foreigners who have learned their English in Great Britain. The change of language had necessarily altered the tone, but nevertheless I was convinced that it was the same voice which had ordered the rug-man about.

"I have been in worse," I replied, taking out a fresh cigarette. "The food is quite a novelty, and the wine really good."

"Yes? ~~What~~ tastes differ."

His lips drew back in what he may have fancied an affable smile. Its actual effect was that of a repulsive sneer.

Every line of his sallow face, clean-shaven save for a small black mustache, told of cold, unscrupulous cruelty. I have known many bad men at one time or another, but I have never seen a more evil face than that of the well-groomed, strongly built young fellow who stood there smiling at us.

The smile was as amiable as he could make it, but it did not cover the fixed intention behind it. He had come into the room for the sole purpose of looking at us. That was obvious. Our presence in the restaurant had aroused his suspicions, and he had come to see who we were. Well, at least I knew now the appearance of one more of my enemies.

"You do not seem to like the place, and yet you are here," I remarked, in order to keep up the appearance of a conversation.

"Oh, a matter of business. Came to see a man. But I shan't wait for him all day." He drew out a gold watch, glanced at it, and sauntered toward the door. "Good day. I hope your meal agrees with you," and he disappeared behind the screen.

"Why didn't you smash him? I'll bet he knows all about it." Rawlins's whisper was hoarse with excitement.

"I want to get Doris, not him," I answered. "Come, we'll follow him."

The back of the young man was in plain sight as we reached the door of No. 9. He was strolling east in the direction of Broadway, an occasional puff of smoke, floating above his head in the still winter morning, indicating that he was in no great hurry.

Although neither Rawlins nor I had been trained in detective work, the task of shadowing that young man presented no great difficulty. The army of hurrying people and the crowded traffic of the streets enabled us to keep close behind him with little or no danger of detection. It is not easy to see anything directly behind one, and even if he had possessed eyes in the back of his head, no casual glance could well have pushed us out from the surrounding throngs.

Our quarry moved on leisurely to Broadway. There he turned to the north, went a few blocks farther and then entered a drug-store. A heavy truck, standing conveniently by the opposite

curb, afforded us a secure shelter in which to watch unobserved until he emerged and resumed his way. Time had now ceased to be of the slightest value to the man. Sauntering slowly onward as though he had the whole day to kill, he stopped from time to time to inspect whatever caught his eye, while we, consumed with anxiety and eager to be back at the restaurant, fretted behind him like nervous horses under a tight curb.

To our relief, at last he appeared to adopt some resolution. Leaving Broadway, he turned westward, walking now at a pace in keeping with the rush about him. With various turnings, he led us into a side street a block or two north, I thought, of his starting point in Albany Street. The long detour might have been the result of indecision or it might have come from fear of being followed. I learned the truth soon enough. Then I thought only that one more of the gang's secrets was about to be ours.

From the corner we watched him stride along the street and turn into a narrow alley half-way down the block. In a second we were after him, running silently and swiftly over the pavement, until we pulled up just before the alley entrance. Cautiously poking his head round the corner, Rawlins found no one in sight. A few steps took us through the alley and we were in a triangular court.

It was a curious little pocket, of a kind familiar to dwellers in London, but rarely come upon in a city as regular in design and as economical of space as New York. Low, dilapidated houses, old but far from venerable, formed the three sides of the court. The cobblestones of the yard itself were strewn with waste paper and refuse. Even in the crisp winter morning, the air was fetid and heavy. What it would be in the dead days of August one shuddered to imagine.

But we were not agents of a tenement commission. In this hidden slum we saw only a likely place for the hatching of crime, an ideal rendezvous for the ruffians we were tracking. And at the farther end of the yard, where two or three ragged children were tumbling about in the gutter dirt, my eye caught the battered door of a house as it swung shut.

Hugging the line of buildings in order

to avoid as much as possible observation from the windows, we made our way to the house. There was no longer hope, however, of taking the gang by surprise.

Unless we were following an absolutely false scent, our visit to the restaurant had served warning to the gang that we were on their trail. What we should learn from the well-dressed, evil-faced young man we were shadowing, we must learn quickly or not at all.

The door opened to our touch—latch-keys, apparently, were a luxury beyond the reach of the inhabitants of the court—and we found ourselves in a dark, malodorous hallway. In the rear, barely visible through the gloom, a staircase led to the unknown regions above. On either side of us, we could distinguish the outlines of a closed door.

While we hesitated, uncertain where to go or what to do, the boards of an upper story creaked under a man's heavy step. Some one was stirring above us. On tiptoe we crossed the hall and slowly mounted the bare stairs. Despite our caution, the loose boards sounded under us, but we kept steadily on, past one silent room after another, until our heads rose level with the last landing.

There we paused. A few sunbeams, struggling through the dirty panes of a skylight in the center, revealed a square, uncarpeted space on which five doors opened, two on each side and one at the end of the hall. Those on the sides were closed, but the door at the end was ajar. From the room behind it came the sound of low voices.

Silently we moved over and bent to listen. Instantly we started back as a shrill whistle ran through the gloomy den. At the same moment the door was flung open. Behind it stood the young man we had followed, a revolver in each hand.

"Hands up, Mr. Lampton!" he said.

CHAPTER XVI.

WITHIN AN ACE OF DEATH.

WE were trapped, caught by a trick as old as crime itself. The moment that the old man told him of the visit of two strangers to the back room of No. 9, the clever scoundrel must

have realized who we were. Then, with marvelous cunning, he had laid his trap for us to walk into as moths fly to a light.

Lounging into the back room, he had at the same time assured himself of our identity and aroused our suspicions. Quite positive that we would follow him, he had seen to it that we should not lose him in the crowds on Broadway. Behind me the clatter of rough-shod feet upon bare boards disclosed his reason for leading us to this den.

It was the home of the gang of which he was in all probability the brains. The ruffians had been warned of our coming by the rug-man whom he had sent from the restaurant. The long détour had given him time to perform his mission.

All this burned itself into my brain as Rawlins and I stood helpless before him, gazing into the muzzles of the revolvers with which he covered us. At the first summons our hands had risen automatically. To those disposed to blame us, I can only recommend a dose of the same medicine. Although I had never been compelled to do so, it is not difficult, I presume, for a man of ordinary courage to realize that he must die and then to die. But, in the hands of an unscrupulous adversary, a revolver is a powerful argument. If taken by surprise, one is apt to yield to it.

Right or wrong, I know that we stood before the villain, our hands in the air, utterly in his power. And all the time the revolver I had not thought to bring with me lay idle in the dreary house in Washington Square.

"You see, gentlemen"—again the lips curled away from the white teeth in a cruel sneer—"you see, gentlemen, I rather think I have you. Look behind you."

That was too old a game to play even on such a simpleton as I had proved myself to be. If I had to die, death should come while I faced it. I said nothing, but my eyes never left his face.

Rawlins, however, must have yielded to his first impulse, for he cried out: "Great Scott, six more of them there!"

An evil grin spread over the features of the young man, but his revolvers never wavered.

"Quite right, sir," he sneered. "Your

observation is remarkable, though you did take me for a silly fool. But you'll be better acquainted with me and with them before long. I have no wish to kill you," he went on calmly, "for you are nothing but a harmless idiot who has done us one very good turn already. You will find this a healthy, if monotonous, residence for a time.

"As for you, Mr. Lampton, you can give us some information. Don't mouth at me that way—it doesn't terrify me. Take my advice, and give it of your own accord. We have ways of making you, you know."

He took a step nearer and leered in my face, taking care to keep more than arm's length from me, however, his revolver still pointed at my breast. Then, glancing up at the palms of my hands above my head, he asked:

"Did you ever hear of thumbscrews, Mr. Lampton?—What's that?"

Nothing that I knew of. No one had moved. The ruffians behind me were quiet, and, except for his own voice, I had heard no sound in the gloomy hall.

Yet something had startled the man out of his contemptuous composure. In his astonishment, he sprang back. For a brief instant the muzzle of his two revolvers pointed at the floor.

In that one instant I leaped. Almost at the same moment the two pistols barked—almost, for before he could take aim, I had bound his arms to his sides and the bullets plunged harmlessly into the floor.

We crashed down together, I uppermost. Pausing just long enough to drive my fist into his face as he lay half-stunned by his fall, I stumbled to my feet and dived for the open door ahead.

I reached it in time to wheel about and see Tom thrust—there was not space enough to club—the point of my stick into the mouth of the nearest of the six men rushing at us.

With an inarticulate gurgle of pain, the fellow reeled back, blocking the path of his comrades. Neither Tom nor I waited to see more. Tearing past the door, we slammed it in the face of our pursuers, turned the key, and fell against it in time to withstand their first rush.

The door was strong. For the moment we were safe, but for the moment only.

The room was a good prison but a bad fortress, and I glanced hastily about for some means of strengthening our defenses.

All that the place offered was a cot, covered with grimy bedding, a table, and two battered chairs—little enough, but, none the less, something.

"Quick; that bed!" I cried.

In a moment Rawlins and I had pulled it across the door. Then the table was hurled upon it, followed by the chairs, and we stepped back, out of range of possible shots at random through the door. As a barricade, it was ridiculous; but I had my stick again. The first man who tried to scale it would fare badly.

"Close—that," muttered Rawlins, breathing heavily as he mopped his face with his coat-sleeve. "Too blamed close. A-ah!"

He sprang by me where I leaned against the wall just as a long knife whizzed past my ear and hung quivering in the wall.

My old enemy, the rug pedler, had flung it. He it was whose voice we had heard through the open door, talking to the young man I knocked unconscious. When we burst into the room, he must have taken refuge under the cot. We had pulled his hiding-place from over his head, and then, driven by despair, he had attempted to steal upon me and knife me.

It was the act of a man mad with terror. My back was turned to him, but Rawlins had detected the crawling danger. I spun upon my heel in time to see Tom throw himself upon the rascal. A minute later he flung from him an inert mass and rose erect.

"The snake!" he cried. "I wonder if I've done for him."

The pedler's face was black, and deep in the scrawny flesh of his throat were the marks of Tom's fingers, but he still breathed. If we could only bring him to, we might wring from him the key to Doris's prison.

"Water!" I ordered breathlessly. "Get me water."

Tom's eyes traveled in disgust round the bare walls of the filthy hole.

"They don't use it here," he said. "Kick him on the soles of the feet—I've seen policemen do that."

The brilliant suggestion was never put to the test. The words were barely out of his mouth when a great weight crashed against the door and we caught the sound of splintering wood.

The ruffians without had possessed themselves of a battering-ram. Once more it swung against the door, and again we heard the wood splinter. In another minute they would be upon us, and the odds were too heavy.

In that instant the vision of Michael Kara slipping back the bolt of the gate in the Paris garden flashed into my mind, only to be thrown aside at once. The act had been a stroke of genius. It could not be imitated here. But on the heels of that vision came another—the figure of my friend poised on the sill before he leaped. He had gone by the window, so would we.

Cobwebs and dust hung thick about the edges of the one window. Obviously, the dweller in this den had little love for fresh air, and there was no time to waste in struggling with the disused sashes.

Seizing a chair from the futile barricade, I hurled it at the narrow aperture. Straight through glass and flimsy strips of wood it burst its way, the noise of the impact drowned in another thundering assault upon the door.

With a shout of delight, Rawlins scrambled through the shattered window. I was hard upon his heels. We were on a tin gutter that stretched the length of the row of houses. Though it sagged beneath our weight as we ran, it held until we stopped, out of breath and somewhat giddy, just above the entrance of the courtyard.

Staring up at us from the ground below, startled by the uproar and the shower of broken glass about their heads, were the children we had seen playing in the front of the den of thieves from which we had fled.

From the windows on the other side of the yard a few heads were cautiously thrust out. Otherwise, the court slumbered as before in the winter's sunshine. Its inhabitants, I fancy, had become past masters in the art of minding their own business.

We did not linger to satisfy what curiosity they possessed. Smashing in an-

other window, we found our way into a room, the mate of that from which we had escaped. This one was deserted, and the door unlocked.

In the hallway an old woman rushed out to meet us, shrieking something; but we brushed roughly by her and clattered down the stairs, through the alley, and into the street.

There was no attempt at pursuit. Possibly the ruffians forced their way into the room too late, or they may not have cared to follow us along our dizzy path. Perhaps, audacious as they were, their courage failed them when it came to murder in broad daylight. Whatever the cause, we stood unharmed in the quiet street. The trap had failed.

CHAPTER XVII.

A WOMAN'S HANDKERCHIEF.

PANTING for breath, we looked at each other without a word. We had saved our skins. Beyond that, there was no cause for congratulations. Doris was still unfound, and we had only succeeded in warning our enemies.

Rawlins gave terse expression to our thoughts.

"We've gummed the game, all right," he cried. "What next?"

"She's not there," I said bitterly, pointing into the narrow alley. "I'll wager that fellow is far too shrewd to lead us where she is. But I'll give him a chance to give me information. Run to the nearest police station, Tom. Tell them who we are and what we're after. They know all about the case. Bring them back, and we'll round up the gang. I'll stay here on guard."

Not pausing to reply, Tom darted off, turned the corner, and vanished. Left alone, I took up my station at the farther end of the alley, whence I could command an uninterrupted view of the courtyard.

A more prosaic specimen of the slums one could not find in the length and breadth of Manhattan Island. The children had gone back to their play. The heads had been withdrawn from the windows. The courtyard stretched before my eyes, exactly as it had when Tom and I entered it a few minutes before.

It had been a clever trap, as clever and as daring as the whole black, mysterious conspiracy which had robbed me of Doris. What miracle had made it fail? As I stood in the shadow of the alley, striving for patience to await Tom's return, I racked my brains for the answer to this question.

For a fraction of a second the young villain had lost command of himself. At the time he was threatening me with torture, with the thumbscrews. With an involuntary shudder, I spread out my hands and stared at them. On the inside of my finger was the seal of Michael Kara.

"What's that?" he had cried as he looked above my head. He must have seen and recognized the ring of my friend.

The clatter of horses' hoofs and the rumble of a heavy wagon on cobblestones put a sudden end to my reflections. Rawlins had brought with him the reserves from the police station. At their head, we charged across the yard and into the house.

It was deserted. Two or three decrepit men and women, it is true, we rooted out from their hovels on the lower floors, but of the gang which had attacked us we found no trace. Only the broken door and shattered window remained to testify to the truth of our wild tale.

The sergeant, a red-faced, corpulent individual, who obviously resented our intrusion upon his hours of rest, turned upon me with a sneer.

"Well, Mr. Lampton, bring on your murderers."

Blankly I gazed about me.

"They were here," I muttered stupidly.

"Perhaps," he returned with another sneer. "But if two fellows came bursting into my house uninvited, you wouldn't find me over-polite, nor my friends either. You take my advice and leave detective-work to the force—amateurs don't go."

He marched away, followed by his men. From in front of the house, where we remained in dejected silence, Rawlins and I heard the patrol-wagon rumble off. As the noise died away, Tom turned to me.

"How the deuce—" he began.

"There's a back yard," I interrupted. "I suppose they went by that."

"Where?" asked Tom fatuously.

My pent-up rage burst upon his innocent head.

"Don't be a fool," I stormed. "I want none of your jokes. How do I know where they've gone? Talk sense or shut up, can't you?"

Tom looked at me as he had looked in the restaurant when I accused him of cowardice, but again he controlled himself.

"I'm not joking," he said, "and I'm trying to talk sense. Let's go back to the restaurant and talk to that Lalla girl."

The thought was already in my mind. With a grunt of assent, I led the way through the courtyard and into the street. There I came to a halt once more.

"They'll never let us see her," I said. "If we ask for her, it will only serve to tell them who put us on the trail. Then she'll be shipped off somewhere, and we'll be left in the dark."

"Have the police arrest the whole outfit," suggested Tom.

"How will that give me Doris?" I retorted. "No, no; we must do this alone. Lalla knows, and she will tell us. We must see her. Ah, I have it!"

I set out at a run toward the Hudson River, Rawlins following in wonder at my heels. At the corner of West Street a truck blocked my path, and he caught up with me.

"What is it? Where are you going?" he panted.

"Benoukan, the quartermaster on the Virginia—we'll send him for her," I cried, and we ran on.

Above the tangle of boxes, packing-cases, trucks, and toiling, shouting longshoremen, loomed the great red funnels of the Virginia. In the sunshine at the entrance to the pier a group of sailors were lounging with their pipes.

They stared in amazement at the two well-dressed individuals who burst upon them, breathlessly demanding to know the whereabouts of one Paul Benoukan. For a time, indeed, their astonishment was so great that they could do no more than gape at us. At length one of them waved a blackened clay pipe in the di-

rection of a saloon on the opposite corner.

"I seen 'im goin' in there 'arf an hour ago. Maybe 'c's there yet," he remarked, and at once relapsed into his former state of amazed silence.

With a brief word of thanks, we ran back across the street and into the saloon. In the group of longshoremen and sailors gathered about the bar, I recognized the swarthy features of Benoukan. For once fortune was fighting with us.

His attention attracted by the noise of our abrupt entrance, the quartermaster glanced up at us. Immediately his glass of beer was set down upon the bar so hard that the liquid splashed over the sides upon the sleeve of his neighbor. His figure straightened, and almost automatically his hand rose to the salute.

Disregarding the questions and outcries of his companions, he obeyed my gesture, following me to the street. Then, after another of the low bows with which I was already familiar, he stood awaiting my pleasure. For some unknown reason of his own, the man was more than willing to admit my right to command.

"Benoukan." I began, "I have need of you, and I know I can trust you."

A dark flush crept into the man's cheeks, and he shifted uneasily on his feet.

"Your excellency has the ring," he muttered sheepishly. Paul Benoukan had had little flattery in his life, I fancy.

"I have seen Lalla," I went on. "She will tell me what she knows. But I must see her again and at once. We cannot go to the restaurant again—they know who we are. I want you to go there and bring Lalla—us. We will wait here." I pointed to the back room of the saloon.

The quartermaster hesitated, fumbling in distress with the cap he had held in his hands since I began to speak.

"The ship," he said. "I must be on board in half an hour."

"You will not suffer," I answered. "I will see to that. But go, and go at once."

With another bow, Benoukan turned upon his heel, making off rapidly down

the street. Rawlins and I watched until his short figure was lost in the throng. Then we entered the back room and seated ourselves at a table. Beyond a few curious glances that came to us through the open doorway from the group at the bar, we were left undisturbed.

There was no attempt at conversation. When we first sat down I had pulled my watch from my pocket, and now it lay on the table between us. From time to time one or the other glanced at it. Otherwise we hardly moved, though I recall that Rawlins lighted an enormous number of cigarettes, which he threw away half-consumed.

While we sat idle in the reeking, sordid atmosphere of a West Street saloon, the fate of a helpless girl and my life's happiness were in the hands of an ignorant sailor. The thought was not a pleasant one.

So we sat in mute agony, until at last Rawlins could bear it no more.

"In two minutes it will be an hour," he said, glancing at my watch. "How much longer will you give him, Ronald?"

I gave him no answer, for even as he spoke the street door swung open and Benoukan stood before us. The swarthy face was now a dark purple, and he gasped for breath like one who had run hard. However long the errand had taken, it was apparent that the messenger had not loitered on the road.

"She cannot get out," he panted; "but she says, come quick. Not the restaurant, the door to the left, the top floor. I show you, but they know me, and they get me later—knife me in the dark. Go quick, she says."

Together, Rawlins and I dashed from the room. Behind us the unkempt, shirt-sleeved waiter roared in incoherent rage. I believe now that he was demanding money for the two huge glasses of bad beer that remained untasted on our table. Then I neither knew nor cared what he wanted.

Down West Street we flew, dodging under horses' noses, jostling unoffending pedestrians, followed by curses and jeers. A policeman bellowed something at us as we passed, and a stone, flung by an irate and disreputable citizen who had

sunered in a collision with Tom, took off my hat; but we sped on without a glance behind us.

In Albany Street we pulled up abruptly before No. 9. In the low-ceilinged front room of the restaurant the same roughly clad customers, or their doubles, whom we had encountered some hours earlier at their breakfast, were now devoting themselves to dinner.

Through the windows we could see the burly proprietor, Nikola, and an assistant or two, bustling about among the long tables. Apparently, our visit had not been permitted to interfere with the serious business of eating.

For the fraction of a second only did we glance into the unattractive little eating-shop before we turned to the narrow door at the left that must lead to the floor above the restaurant. It was locked.

I pulled wildly at the old-fashioned bell-handle, but no answering jingle came to our ears.

Frantic with anxiety, I had drawn back my foot to kick upon the wood, when the door suddenly opened and a man emerged—a fellow of thirty-odd, and, from his appearance, a workman in fairly prosperous circumstances.

Obviously, we were both an unexpected and unwelcome sight to him, for, after one sudden start, he retreated into the doorway, blocking the entrance with an ugly scowl in his eyes.

"What you want?" he growled at last, one hand upon the door-knob, ready to close it in our faces.

"Get out of the way," I answered, thrusting myself forward so that I almost touched him.

The man glared savagely at me, but he did not move. I had hardly expected that he would.

"What you want?" he repeated more roughly than before.

It was an old trick, but a simple and effective one. Thrusting my foot between his, I swept him suddenly backward with my forearm. The fellow went down like a man of straw.

Before he could regain his feet or offer any resistance, Tom and I were half-way up the stairs.

It was a smaller house than the trap into which we had been led earlier in the day. Only three doors opened on

the top landing. The one opposite the stairs revealed nothing but a collection of rubbish, piled up under the sloping roof. The other two gave access to rooms utterly devoid of all furniture, save that in one a cot-bed was drawn against the wall.

"The door to the left! The top floor!"

We had taken the door to the left and were on the top floor, but there was nothing here. Could this be another trap? Had Benoukan played me false? Speechless with impotent wrath, I raged from one barren room to another without thought or purpose.

Then from below came the clump of heavy footsteps on the stairs and an angry shout!

"What you want up there? Come down here," followed by a flood of profane abuse in broken English.

For once bad language served a good end. Like a drench of cold water, it brought me to my senses. Peering over the staircase well, I saw the head of the man I had upset, climbing upward.

If he was coming after us, he had a hard job ahead of him. Once more we might be on a wild-goose chase, but now that I was on the top floor, I proposed to stay there.

At the head of the stairs I waited his approach, the loaded night-stick, which has already served us so well, tucked out of sight behind my back. The fellow had rounded the lower landing, and was well on his way up the last flight of stairs before he caught sight of me. Then he came to an abrupt halt, glaring up at me, a long knife clutched in his right hand.

"You come down," he ordered. "You come down, or I call police."

It was a stupid attempt at a bluff. Had he wanted the police, he would have aroused the entire street when we first forced our way into the building. The less he cared for the police, the more determined I was to stay where I was. In grim silence I awaited his next move.

It came suddenly. Seeing me apparently unarmed, he thought to take me with a rush. Any one but the blockhead with whom I had to deal would have known that I was prepared for just this.

As he sprang forward, my stick rose in the air. I aimed at the shoulder, not the head, for there was no positive proof of the man's guilt, but the result was equally satisfactory.

He saw the blow coming, and threw up his arms to ward it off. The leather-covered steel crashed down on the wrist that held the knife. With a howl of pain, the fellow dropped his weapon, turned, and scurried down the stairs, cursing and sobbing.

His bullet-like, close-cropped head was still visible from my station at the head of the staircase, when a shout from Rawlins drew me back to the bare rooms behind me.

Tom had pushed the cot-bed away, and was tearing at the wall-paper, like a madman. For an instant I stood staring at him in blank bewilderment. Then, as strip after strip was ripped from the wall, I understood. Before us was the side of an iron door.

"The paper didn't quite fit," explained Rawlins, still tearing at the covering of the door. "I saw the crack. Where the dickens is the lock? By Jove, look!"

He lifted a loose flap of the paper and revealed a keyhole in the iron, with a small ring, set flat in the door, above it. Upon this we tugged with all our strength, but the door did not budge. To attempt to force our way through the massive metal was an absurdity. Once more we were blocked.

But that door concealed something. It was for us to learn what. The window of the room opened on an ordinary back yard. Close to it, on the left, was a window of the adjoining house, the iron landing of the fire-escape in front of it lined with potted plants.

Then, as I leaned far out, in a vain effort to penetrate with my eyes this green screen, the truth dawned upon me. The wall of the room in which we stood was the wall of the house. If the iron door led anywhere, it led into the adjacent building. Since we could not go through, we must go around it.

The two windows were close together, and, as I have said, from one projected the iron landing, converted, in defiance of the street regulations of the fire de-

partment, into a flower garden. Less than six feet separated sill from railing. The material for a bridge was close at hand.

We fell upon the rickety wooden frame of the cot like beasts upon the carcass of their prey. Below, the slamming of doors and a series of calls and answers indicated that the fellow I had wounded was summoning reinforcements. But we had no time for him.

In a minute we had wrenched free from its last bolt one of the side planks of the cot. Then, with a silent prayer that it might serve, we shoved it through the window. The farther end crashed through the row of plants and rested, with hardly an inch to spare, upon the iron railing.

Over the narrow bridge I sprang to the balcony, broke through the locked window, and leaped within. In the center of the room I halted, staring with bewildered eyes at the scene that presented itself to me.

Here, in the heart of an obscure, poverty-stricken quarter of New York, hidden under the eaves of a house falling to pieces from age and neglect, was luxury incarnate.

My feet just sank in the softest of rugs. It did not need a second glance to realize the value of the pictures which lined the walls. Heavy curtains hung by the window through which I had found my entrance. In the large hearth the embers of a wood fire were still smoldering.

All this I saw, but with sick eyes. The room was empty.

Heavy draperies at one side, swaying in the draft from the broken window, caught my eye.

I dashed between them into a bedroom as magnificently furnished as the apartment I had left.

It, too, was empty.

A ray of sunlight, penetrating into a far corner, shone upon something white. Mechanically, I walked over and picked it up.

It was a bit of lace—a woman's handkerchief. On it were embroidered the letters D. R.


Doris has been here, then. We had come too late.

(To be continued.)

DRESSLER GETS EVEN.

BY WILL ROBINSON.

A SHORT STORY.

EPITA'S mother was Margerita Lenora Felicia Manuela Lucia Portales y La Reux, which was a good deal of a name to wear in a twelve-by-sixteen adobe, even though said adobe be kalsomined a shrimp pink on the inside and be flanked by a *porte cochère* of cottonwood boughs.

The La Reux descended from Pepita's paternal grandfather, François Victoire La Reux, a gallant, red-trousered zouave who drifted from Algeria to Mexico in Maximilian's time, and who tarried long enough to become an ancestor.

Pepita's father, son of the dashing François, was a degenerate, with a handsome face and promiscuous habits. Much to his wife's relief, he drank himself to death the third year of their marriage.

As for Pepita herself — Pepita's eyes were as black as sloes; Pepita's cheek was as smooth and soft as a violet's petal; Pepita's lips were like unto pomegranate blossoms — Pepita's heart? That is more difficult to describe.

There were those who lived in Pepita's principality, which extended from the Upper Verde to Gila Bend, who had been known to say that Pepita's heart was entirely an imaginary quantity — a cipher, indeed — surrounded only by a vacuum. The authors of these heresies, however, were, for the most part, mothers of other Pepitas — Doroteas and Raquels — and, of course, under the circumstances, were only exercising their inalienable maternal rights.

Certainly, no such lese-majesty had ever passed the lips of either Jim Sibley, who ran sheep on the Mogollons, or Lem Dressler of the Gridiron ranch.

Sibley was an old admirer, who had

formed Pepita's acquaintance at the Otero *baile* some time in the dim antiquity of the previous year, and had remained constant through twelve long sheep-blatted months.

It had been scarce a month since Dressler had first visited the La Reux jacal. He had stopped to inquire concerning a missing two-year-old, and had been smitten into dumb worship at the sight of the Señora La Reux's bewilderingly charming seventeen-year-old.

The age, you see, is given baldly; seventeen, and still unmarried. But in Spanish Arizona, even that extreme age is better, with wit and aplomb, than the usual budding *débutanteism* of fourteen, without Pepita's charm.

It must not be inferred from their prominent mention that Sibley and Dressler were the only members of Pepita's corps of admirers. On the contrary, the society of perpetual admiration of Pepita numbered—including honorary and dishonorary members—almost every gentleman of prominence in the valley.

Indeed, the young lady was a sort of Burke's Peerage. A name inscribed on Pepita's calling-list established beyond cavil one's social position.

Sibley's special bid for distinction was the fact that he was Pepita's only sample of predatory wealth, his tainted money being represented by a sixth interest in a band of three thousand sheep.

On the other hand, Dressler, being a cowboy, entitled him to a social position that a sheepman could never hope to attain; but, like many another proud member of an exclusive aristocracy, financially, he was a rope of sand, wasting his patrimony and procrastinating his matrimony at the palace crap-game with monthly regularity.

A second advantage that accrued to Sibley's credit was propinquity. Following his usual custom, with the coming of cool weather he had driven his sheep down from the Mogollons to browse on the winter's growth along the river, almost in Pepita's back yard.

For Dressler, it was all of forty miles, as his sorrel cow-horse traveled, from the Gridiron chuck-wagon to the *hacienda* La Reux.

II.

THIS explains why on Sunday morning, as early as breakfast-time, the sheepman was industriously taking advantage of the sunshine to make his hay. Outstretched on the clean-swept ground he lay, his face in the shade of the cotton-wood *porte cochère* and his one hundred and ninety pounds of flabby muscle in the sun, making love to his lady after the manner of his kind.

"I don't know what I'm going to do if that girl down in Tucson don't quit pestering me with her letters," he began modestly. "Now, what do you suppose all these girls see in a man like me, Pepita?"

"I dunno. Why don't you marry that Tucson girl, Meester Sibley?"

It is impossible to indicate the delicate ennui and the lack of interest the girl managed to include in her question.

"Because I'm going to marry you."

"Ees it possible? Many other men say like that, too."

"Then why don't you marry them?" This was rare repartee for Sibley.

"Maybe I will," said the girl; "but only one of them. That ees a plenty. And he mus' have lots of money."

"What's the matter with me having lots of money, Pepita? You say the word, and you'll have more silk dresses than you can stick in a trunk."

Before she could answer, there was borne upon their ears a strident tenor, accompanied by the steady jog of a cow-pony:

I thought one winter, just for fun—
After cow-punching all was done—
I'd rest my brone' and rest my gun
And hunt me up a girl.
I'd corral her everything that goes;
I'd take her in to all the shows;
I'd cut out all the other—

"That mus' be Meester Dressler," said Pepita softly. "You know Meester Dressler? He's very old friend of mine. He's a very fine *caballero*."

Sibley bristled like a fat house-dog when the keen call of a hill-wolf smites his ear; which was right and proper, he being a sheepman and Dressler's line being cows.

The horseman's smile, however, included them all, even the portly Señora La Reux, who was spitting *tortillas* by the bake-oven in the back yard. "*Como está V. Señora?* Howdy, Jim? Here again—or yet? Gee, Peetie, it seems good to see you. Honest, it's been so long I was afraid I wouldn't know the place."

Pepita flashed him a fascinating smile. "Yes," she assented, "it hass been the mos' lonesomeles' week off my life—except"—and now the sheepman got the glance—"when Meester Seebley would come to drive the lonesomeles' away."

"You bet! That's my long suit," asserted the sheepman defiantly. He wasn't to be bluffed out by a new pair of chaparejos and a red silk handkerchief, not while he weighed one hundred and ninety pounds, and still had his sixth interest in the sheep.

"Wass that a new song you were singing?" began Pepita.

"Bah! That's Lon Woody's old song," put in the sheepman. "I heard that song years ago."

"You blat just like your muttons, don't you, Jim?" returned Lem genially. "Now, you sing us a nice song. Peetie, bring the young man a guitar."

"You mussn' begin so much quarrel-someness," began Pepita softly, her nostrils quivering pleasurably at the belligerent attitude of her admirers. "We will smoke a pipe of peace—yes?" Mysteriously she produced the "makings" and deftly rolled a cigarette. "The firs' ees for Meester Dressler, because he came las'; the nex' ees for Meester Sibley; the las' ees for me. Now, Meester Dressler can give me a light."

She stood so close to the cowboy that her hair touched his cheek, and as she tilted her face to raise her cigarette to his her eyelids drooped a little, and the look she gave him from beneath the long black lashes meant—anything you choose.

It was playing with fire, with the big sheepman at her back, but it was a game Pepita had played before, and she evidently liked it.

Her cigarette at last was lighted, and she turned to Sibley, who was also standing.

"Oh, so big a man! Why don' you sit down and res' yourself? So strong a man!" She put her slim fingers around his big biceps and pressed them softly. "See, Meester Dressler, ees he not so big a man? Now, we mus' sit down, and I will tell you all about the circus. It comes to Phenix in three weeks. A very good circus. I see the pictures."

"Sure! I saw them, too," said the cowboy promptly; "at Granite Reef, on my way down. We'll see it together, Peetie. I was just going to break the news to you."

"Twenty minutes late," interrupted the sheepman gruffly. "She's going with me."

"How about that, little girl?" asked Dressler.

Pepita looked doubtful. There was no question but what the good-looking cowboy cut much the more dashing figure, still, wool was going up. "I theenk it would be very nice to go with both of you."

"No family circle for me," said Dressler decidedly. "Let's leave the children at home, Peetie, and have a good time."

"Mighty big talk for a mighty little man," put in the sheep-herder belligerently. "And, while I'm talking about it, I'm growing particular about the landscape around here. That red rag of yours spoils it for me. If you get a little gayer I'll ask you to take it home. You're not very popular around here, anyway."

III.

THE cowboy turned his back on his antagonist. "Peetie," he said to the girl, "you see how it is. The atmosphere is getting kind of crowded. Don't seem to be room for us all. You heard the fat boy's little bluff. I think I'll call him. It's up to you to tell us what we've got."

"If you want to execute matrimony with a band of sheep, that's your business, and let's me out; but if you should

happen to prefer cows, it'd please me most to death. The boss says my cow-punching's going to be worth sixty a month after this. Next spring he's going to plant me on an alfalfa patch. There'll be a house and money enough for *frijoles* and circuses, too. How about it?"

"Don't forget what I told you, Pepita," warned the big sheep-herder earnestly. "There'll be four thousand more lambs in the spring."

Pepita looked disturbed. She had evidently been enjoying matters very well as they stood. Still, she was seventeen. "It ees so hard to know."

"I think we could talk it over better," said Sibley truculently, "if there weren't so many around. You crook your finger and I'll take the little man down and throw him in the river. Then there wouldn't be so many left to choose from."

Dressler whirled upon his rival like a cat. "I'll fight you with fists, rifles or six-shooters, you big four-flusher."

"Oh, mus' you fight?" asked the girl, with demure lips and dancing eyes. "An' you will fight, too, I suppose, Meester Sibley? You are so beeg and strong." She gave him the full battery of her trouble-making eyes.

"It's up to you, Peetie. What do you say?" demanded the cowboy. "I'll be good to you, little girl, if you give me the chance."

"Oh, I like you both too much," said Pepita. "Only you mus' not fight."

"Peetie," said Dressler bluntly. "I am beginning to believe that you would as soon see us scrap as not."

"No, no, no!" lied the girl. "But you are so quarrelsomeness; like two men down in Chihuahua who lofe a girl. They fight on horseback. They ride fast at each other. The guns go 'Bang! Bang!' like that. Mos' excitement." She drooped her lashes, and looked demurely at the floor. "But it wass very wicked to make fight like that."

"I'll play you seven-up for it," suggested Sibley. "Got the cards right here in my pocket."

Dressler looked at the sheepman in amazement. "What a ladylike arrangement," he drawled. "What do you say to that, Pepita?"

"Ver' well," agreed the girl reluctantly. "If you theenk it would be

wrong to fight, maybe that would be a good way."

"And you will marry the one who wins?"

"Si. Will you play, Meester Dressler?"

"I'll tell you what I will do. Seven-up is a little too much like sheep-herding for me. I'll cut for the lady, Jim. Ace is high. Ace of hearts, top of the pile. Is it a go?"

Sibley swallowed hard, nodded, and threw the pack of cards on the table.

"Shuffle them, Peetie," said Dressler.

The girl did so.

"Who cuts first?" asked the sheep-herder.

Pepita looked at Dressler and smiled.

The cowboy turned over the top card. It was the ace of diamonds.

Sibley went white, and with the returning wave of color shook his fist in his rival's face. "I believe you knew just what that card was, you miserable shrimp."

"Play the game," said Dressler sternly, "or get out. You forget that Pepita shuffled the cards."

"I don't forget that you watched her," retorted Sibley. "but I'll show you a trick worth two of yours. Ace of hearts is high, is it? Well, you watch me cut it." He drew from his belt a six-inch sheath-knife and with the full force of his arm drove the blade down through the pack of cards until the point reached the table. "I guess that cuts the ace, doesn't it? When I want a thing, I usually get it, and if you want anything more, Mr. Cowboy, I'll give it to you right now."

He looked as big as a grizzly bear as he leaned, roaring, across the table.

The strife in the air was as wine to Pepita, and she smiled frank encouragement at the big combatant. At the glance, the sheepman swelled with the spirit of battle.

Dressler caught the full significance of the look and its effect. Indolently he stepped toward the table, then, with incredible swiftness slapped Sibley first with his right palm and then with his left across the face.

"Ah, you will fight for *me*!" whispered Pepita softly to the cowboy.

While she was still speaking the sheep-

herder stripped the cards from his knife-blade, and slashed frantically with it across the table.

Dressler jumped lightly aside, and laughed scornfully. Instinctively he felt for his revolver, but, alas! that familiar weapon lay carefully rolled in his bedding in the Gridiron bunk-house.

IV.

SIBLEY, too crazy with rage to go round the table, crashed it down like an angry bull. Dressler whirled in his tracks, ran diagonally through the court shaded by the cottonwood boughs, and almost fell over the Señora La Reux as she steamed around the corner of the house.

By the time the cowboy had regained his balance Sibley was on him. Again the knife swooped through the air, and Dressler felt its sharp sting as its point pricked his skin.

Swiftly he ran across the clearing to his horse, and placing his hand on the saddle-horn, vaulted clear over the animal. The second thus gained, he used to untie his lariat, and was clear of the horse again before Sibley could reach him.

Now he ran back to the cleared level space in front of the house. The sheep-herder came rushing toward him like a whirlwind. Coolly the cowboy swung the coiled rope around his head, and then launched the noose. The rope whistled through the air like a rifle bullet, and the loop, four feet across, dropped over Sibley's shoulders.

Quick as a flash of light, Lem Dressler pulled the rope taut and gave it a cowboy's jerk. The sheep-herder fell to the ground like a roped steer. A moment later, however, he was on his feet again, but quick as he was, he could not free his arms from the noose or reach it with his knife, though his forearm tugged against the rope until the skin turned purple.

In the center of the clearing stood a snubbing-post, about five feet high, used in the subduing of unruly horses. With the dexterity of a prestidigitator the boy ran to it, still keeping tight the rope, and cast a half-hitch over its top.

The sheep-herder, seeing that his only chance of escape lay in speed, ran to the post to throw over the rope, but the boy

was too quick for him. With a rapidity that made the wood smoke, the rope whined over its smooth surface and Sibley was jerked up against the cottonwood stake with a jolt that made him grunt like a pig. Then round and round ran the cowboy, the rope in his hand ever as taut as a fiddle-string, until, from neck to ankles, the sheepherder was wrapped as helpless, in the uncompromising sunlight, as a calf waiting the branding-iron.

Dressler stopped and smiled a cheerful, impersonal smile at the world in general. Then he walked up to the frightened sheepman and, as a watchful parent might remove a dangerous plaything from a baby, loosened Sibley's fingers from the knife-handle.

Next, he addressed him in a few virile, picturesque sentences. He expatiated on the various merits of the sheep and cattle business, discussing Sibley's probable ancestry, made a few remarks on the ethics of card-playing, the courtesy due to women, and a few more on errors in judgment in the selection of weapons.

Tiring of this, he sat down in front of the big man and regarded him curiously.

Suddenly a shadow fell upon him from behind, and an instant later a soft cheek pressed against his own. It belonged to the fair and guileless Pepita.

"*Bueno! Bueno! hombre. Muy bonito!*" Oh, so quick you are! So quick! like the *gato* jumps. I have so very much proud that I am to be your *querida*, your—what you say—your goodheart. Now, what you do with the beeg man, you smart boy?"

"Eh?" said Dressler. "Oh, yes; we were cutting cards to see which of us was going to marry you. Gee; I'd almost forgotten about that. Was just having a little pipe-dream. Never wake a man up until it's morning, Peetie; it's bad luck."

"What are you going to do with beem?"

"Him?" grinned the boy. "Oh, I'll fix him."

Slowly he walked around his victim, unwinding the rope, and finally threw off the noose. The sheep-herder stood free.

Painfully, one by one, Sibley spread apart his stiffened fingers, and slowly and awkwardly raised a hand to his face to wipe away the sweat that stood in great beads upon his forehead.

"I was just joking with you; you know that, Lem," ventured the herder. It was the first words he had spoken. Every particle of fight was out of the big man. He was as mild as a Sonora dove.

The boy laughed in pure joy. "Sure," he said, "I knew it. I knew you were joking. Anybody could see that."

"You don't hold it up against me, do you, Lem? You won't try to get even?" There were actually tears in the man's eyes.

Dressler rubbed the soft adolescent bristles on his chin thoughtfully. "Yes," he said, "I reckon I'll have to get even with you. You were pretty pizen, you know. I almost hate to treat even a sheepman so, but I guess you'll have to take your medicine."

"For Heaven's sake, Lem," mumbled Sibley, "what you going to do to me?"

"The worst ever, Jim. Give you Peetie, here. Guess that'll hold you for a while. Here's your toad-sticker for a wedding present. My, but you'll make a peachy couple."

He dropped the weapon at Sibley's feet, grinned expansively at Pepita, sauntered over to his horse, and jumped lightly to the saddle. A moment later he was jogging along the sage-brush trail, his song filling the peaceful morning air with buoyant lightheartedness:

Says the boss to the cowboy:
"You never can tell;
Sometimes they are angels,
Sometimes they raise—more trouble
than enough."

IMMORTALITY.

THE far sail dips beneath the ocean's verge,
And leaves one blank of sky and waste of sea;
Yet onward speeds, though gone beyond our ken—
Where life's white sail sinks down, a life to be.

P. Walther.

THE ATOMIC THEORY.

BY THOMAS R. YBARRA.

A SHORT STORY.



ICK, I want 'to die!"

At that, poor Dick Garnett, with a sigh of pathetic hopelessness, gave up his arduous task of consoler, and gazed at his roommate with mixed pity and exasperation. After half an hour of heroic combat, he was empty alike of argument, advice, raillery, ridicule, and objugation. All he could do for the time being was to watch the figure at the window, huddled in a chair, gazing out over the rain-swept New York street with eyes reflecting the most genuine and somber pessimistic gloom. Then the call of duty sounded once more to Dick, and he braced himself for another battle.

"Don't be a darned fool, George," he said. Dick evidently believed in the powers of repetition. He had used that typical formula of young man's consolation some dozen times during the preceding half-hour.

George Rowland turned his eyes on Dick—eyes in which all the fire and hope of youth seemed to have been quenched.

"I'm not," he said, pathetically quiet and unruffled. "I'm not at all, Dick. I know mighty well what I'm talking about. I'm down and out. I've shot my bolt. New York has knocked all the life out of me."

Once more he turned to the window and gazed listlessly at the sweep and spatter of the falling rain, at the scurrying pedestrians, and the dark shapes of hansom and automobiles, glistening and dripping against the watery mist.

"New York!"—he shot the name out bitterly from between tight-drawn lips.

"New York, curse it! Why did I ever come here? Why do all the poor blind devils who are broken to pieces and

swallowed up come here every year? Why do we? Oh, that's easy. We're fools.

"New York is like a diamond. From far away, we see nothing but glorious light, and we come trooping toward it to find—a stone! Yes, sir! When I came here I laughed at everybody who tried to turn me away. I came here to be a fine writer and live in Bohemia. Well, I'm a shabby Grub Street hack and I live in the mire. My wish is realized! All my glorious New York is nothing but cold, hard pavements and colder, harder men and women. Bah!—I'm a regular grand orator to-night, eh, Dick? Dramatic and bitter and forceful!" He brought his fist down on the table before him.

"I don't care!" he shouted, while ash-trays and books jumped, and even the chandelier overhead quivered. "No, I don't care! I mean what I say, and I feel it, every word, and I don't give a darn whether it's melodrama—bathos—piffle—rot—or any old thing!" And he buried his face in his hands.

For a while Dick said nothing. The silence was broken only by the confused noises from the rain-soaked street below the windows. Rowland did not move. As if he found relief in not seeing the city which he had just apostrophized so rudely, he kept his face hidden in his hands, on the table in front of him. At length he looked up, tossed his head back impatiently, and pushed the hair away from his forehead.

"George—" Garnett began hesitatingly. He knew that he was approaching dangerous ground. "George"—once more he hesitated, then resolutely plunged in—"why don't you go back home a while—and rest?"

Rowland tossed his head in sudden fury.

"No, sir," he cried. "No, I won't! Go back there and whimper: 'New York has done for me—I'm sick and tired of it—I'm a failure—support me!' No, I won't do that! When I came here from home—as a writer, a budding genius—ha, ha!" His voice grew more cynical as he hurled out his words. "I scorned the advice of everybody at home. I was inspired, you know, Dick, touched with the divine afflatus—unique, apart! All those who advised me to keep away from the game were mere plodders, in the rut, incapable of recognizing inspiration when they saw it. Well—they were right, darned right, and I was an ass. But I won't go back! I challenged New York—it has downed me—let it kill me!"

"But, George," expostulated Garnett, still fighting determinedly, "if you go home, you—you'll find plenty of people—relatives and friends—who'll understand, and—and—sympathize with you."

"No. You're wrong, Dick. Not one of them—relative or friend, man or woman—cares a hang for me!"

"Not one?"

For a brief space Rowland paused without answering, while his eyes grew softer and sweeter. Then his fist crashed down again upon the table.

"Not one, Dick. Not a single one!"

He propped his chin on his hands and gazed blackly at the wall; for a while he remained silent. Then he sat straight again, and looked at his roommate defiantly, agonized.

"I want to die!"

"You want a doctor—that's what you want." Dick Garnett had been eying his friend more closely during his silence. Now, he suddenly crossed the room, seized Rowland's hand, and felt his pulse.

"Whew!" he ejaculated between his teeth, and passed his hand over the other's forehead. Then, without more words, he put on his hat and began working into his overcoat.

"Don't be foolish," objected Rowland.

"You leave me alone," said Dick Garnett.

Rowland fell back into his chair. "Well—I guess I'm all in—and I don't care," he muttered.

"Fiddlesticks!" said Garnett.

And with that parting ray of consolation he went out into the driving rain-storm.

11.

It was typhoid, the doctor said. And he added peremptorily, that the patient must go to a hospital. So Dick Garnett, full of sorrow and foreboding, went out to make the necessary arrangements.

"I've got you a nice private room over at St. Margaret's," he told Rowland, on his return, as cheerily as he could.

"Well, thank Heaven, *Judson's Magazine* finally sent me that hundred," observed the invalid listlessly. "It will pay my hospital board and treatment and"—he laughed a hollow laugh—"all my subsequent expenses."

"Something like a shudder ran through Garnett's frame at the words. "Oh, cut it out—that's a pose!" he protested. Then his eyes met Rowland's, and all the anger in Dick's kind heart was swept away in a pang of remorse and pity.

"George, old boy!" he cried, clapping Rowland on the shoulder, with a feeble little pretense of cheeriness. "Buck up, old chap. Don't be downcast this way. You'll be well in a few days, and back here at the room in a week, and you'll be the author of the great American novel in a month, and—"

"No, Dick," said the sick man, stopping him wearily. "Let me die! It's the only thing I'll ever do successfully!"

Then, as if struck with remorse at sight of the pain which shot over Dick's face, Rowland suddenly seized his roommate's hand and gave it a feverish shake.

"I'm not a coward, Dick," he said, "or I never would have tackled the writing game. I'm not a quitter, or I never would have kept in the fight as long as I have. But what's the use of pretending too long? It surely isn't cowardice and quitting to face the truth, is it? Well—let's face it—I can't write. Humdrum business was the thing for me. I didn't think so—I had dreams—my heavens, what dreams they were, Dick!—and now I've waked up!"

Garnett, with an exasperated shake of his head, tried to interrupt, but Rowland swept on.

"I know," he said, a touch of gentleness tingeing the bitterness of face and voice, "that you believe in me. It's the one unbusinesslike thing about you, old man, but—I'm grateful to you for it. God bless you, Dick." He held out his hand.

"Oh, bosh!" murmured Garnett. But he grasped the outstretched hand. Then a gong sounded in the street.

"The ambulance!" said Rowland. "Good-by, Dick, old man. And—I'm sorry."

Poor Dick helped the hospital people take Rowland down-stairs on the stretcher, and sat with the doctor on the back of the ambulance as it hurried away to St. Margaret's Hospital. There, having seen his friend comfortably installed in his little private room, Garnett returned, heavy hearted, to his own now cheerless lodgings.

Thereupon, a weary round of life began for Dick Garnett. Day after day he repaired to St. Margaret's Hospital to get the latest—always more dispiriting—tidings about Rowland. Once he was admitted to the sick-room and saw the patient, thin and wasted, burning with fever, wandering with delirium.

Night after night, during the time of ordeal, poor Dick's sleep was broken by snatches of nightmare, in which he heard the tread and saw the faces of white-robed doctors and hushed nurses; caught the smell of medicine and the glint of steel instruments, and started upright in bed, wild-eyed and haggard, at the sound of dying groans from his roommate.

One kindly physician of the hospital staff took to rating Dick severely. "Worry will put you in here, too," he said. And Dick dutifully tried to abjure worry, and went on long, cheerless walks. He even attended a gay Broadway show, and returned, more haggard than ever, to hang about the anteroom of the hospital.

Then came the news that the invalid had "turned the corner," that his tough constitution had downed the first onslaught of the disease. With the news, Dick Garnett leaped back into health and good spirits at one bound. Eagerly, impatiently, he waited for the first visitors' day.

"May I go up to see him yet?" he

asked again and again of doctors and nurses, to be met with nothing but frowns and headshakes, and objections. But, at last, the ban was lifted.

"Come on, there, Damon," said the kindly physician one day to Dick. "Pythias is getting on famously now. He'll do, unless he gets a relapse."

It was into a little room, filled with cheerful sunlight, that the doctor led Garnett. On a bed in one corner, weak and white, lay Rowland.

"Hooray, George!" exclaimed Garnett, almost crushing the invalid's hand in the exuberance of his elation. The return of the pressure was hardly less strong. "Look, old boy! Look at the sunlight and—yes, I will be poetic and mushy—listen to the little birds outside in the trees there, and—and all that. Glorious, eh—what? Aren't you happy, old faker?"

Dick stopped. Rowland seemed unresponsive to his outburst.

"Did the doctor tell you I might get a relapse?" he asked.

"Yes, but who cares? You won't! You—oh, for God's sake, George!"

Rowland's eyes were hard and cold. Poor Dick looked at him in exasperation. In the joy of his friend's improvement he had forgotten the cynical Rowland of two weeks before—Rowland, the disillusioned; Rowland, the life-weary. So woe-begone was Dick's face when he perceived Rowland once more that some of the light was chased back into the invalid's eyes. He laid his hand gently for a moment on Garnett's.

III.

"Dick," he said, with a whimsical smile on his wasted features, "do you know anything about the atomic theory?"

"I did at college—when I had to," replied Dick.

At sight of Garnett's deeply puzzled face Rowland laughed weakly. "Oh, not the atomic theory propounded by—by—Democritus, wasn't it? I mean another atomic theory, a much better one—*my* atomic theory, in fact."

"What? What—" began the mystified Dick, dimly suspicious that his friend's brain might be giddy from illness. Rowland went on quite calmly:

"The atomic theory, as evolved by George Rowland, to wit: All the millions of people on this planet, with the exception, say, of William Shakespeare, Miguel de Cervantes, N. Bonaparte, Esq., and some hundreds of other dazzling super-persons, are nothing but insignificant atoms. It behooves them not to concern themselves about why they fit in with each other in countless minglings, juxtapositions and what-nots, thereby assisting the progress of civilization.

"An atom's first duty is to be an atom. The infinite harmonic correlation of atoms into a sublime and tremendous cosmic whole is none of that atom's business. An atom should live an atomic life, seek out, court, and wed some nice little female atom, beget nice little atomic boys and girls, be an atomic ornament to an atomic community, and die in the odor of atomic sanctity. You follow me?"

"Yes," said Garnett dubiously.

"Good," said Rowland. "To resume: But every once in a while, Dick, old molecule, a poor, miserable little fool of an atom—an out-and-out insignificant one, mind you—suddenly loses interest in the purely atomic matters which should claim its attention, and begins concerning itself with the progress of the world, the judgment of posterity, and so forth. Fascinating, but, I repeat, entirely extra-atomic considerations. Thereupon, that atom's mind becomes fixed on dim, mysterious space. It jumps bodily out of its atomic surroundings, scorning atomic banks, and law offices, and brokers' offices, which constitute its proper sphere of life.

"In the meantime, its unimaginative, wise, brother atoms are doing exactly what they were created to do, seeking out and courting and wedding all the nice little female atoms whom the foolish atom might have sought out and courted, and wed. They are begetting nice little atomic boys and girls, and preparing, with plodding atomic precision, to die in the odor of atomic sanctity.

"Whereupon that fool atom suddenly tumbles to the fact that it isn't a super-atom or anything remotely resembling it. And here comes the tragic part of my tale—ahem!—that atom suddenly finds that it has lost every scrap of interest in purely atomic matters. Unsuc-

cessful as a super-atom, it is hopeless as an atom. It is a mere miserable infra-atom. A poor, unhappy, misguided, good-for-nothing failure. That's what it is, Dick."

All the banter had now gone from the invalid's voice, all the whimsical light of mockery from his eyes. He lay before Garnett—as he had sat that other night in their room—worn, disillusioned, old—the man whom Garnett had spurred and upbraided in vain. Poor Dick looked again at his friend, as he had looked at him on that former occasion, in exasperated helplessness.

"Oh, George, don't be a darned fool!" he wailed. "Remember, if you act this way you'll get a relapse, and then—"

He stopped short, appalled. Rowland was smiling.

"I don't care," he said, in dull tones, half to himself, "if I do get a relapse. I—oh, Dick, Dick, I want to—"

There was a knock at the door. The nurse put her head inside it.

"A visitor, Mr. Rowland," she said. Then she withdrew, giving place to somebody else. At sight of this somebody else, Rowland, amazed, half raised himself in bed, propped on his elbow.

"You! You!" he gasped, and in his eyes was the very light of Heaven itself.

The visitor had hesitated timidly, at first, just within the door, and her pretty red cheeks had turned wofully white as she looked at the wasted man before her. Then, with hands outstretched, she advanced toward him, glowing with pity, and tenderness, and love.

Unheeded, Dick Garnett rose from his chair, took up his hat and gloves, and walked out of the room.

Next day he reappeared, to find his friend napping. So he sat by the bed until he awoke. As soon as Rowland's eyes were open, Garnett dumped upon the bed a consignment of magazines and books, and cheerily shook the invalid's shoulder.

"How goes it?" he inquired.

Rowland smiled.

"Dick," he said, and Dick's heart leaped with joy as he saw the old fire in his roommate's eyes. "Dick, old boy, I—I want to get well!"

THE CLEVERNESS OF CARDILLAC.*

BY ROBERT BARR,

Author of "A Woman Intervenes," "Tekla," "Young Lord Stranleigh," Etc., Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

VICTOR DE CARDILLAC comes to Paris, bearing a letter from Charles d'Albert de Luynes, favorite of King Louis XIII. Cardillac meets Tresor, who tells Cardillac the letter is a hoax, and offers him a chance to meet De Luynes. Cardillac provokes De Luynes to a duel and is wounded. He discovers that his antagonist is not De Luynes, but the Duc de Montreuil.

The duke and Cardillac are surrounded by the guard. The duke pretends that Cardillac has been wounded by footpads. He invites Cardillac and the sergeant to his house, and wheedles from the sergeant a *lettre de cachet* signed by the king. The duke proposes to furnish Cardillac with funds, if Cardillac will undertake to recover his kidnapped daughter Thérèse, who is detained in a royal convent.

Cardillac gets into the convent by using the *lettre de cachet*. He is forced to flee to avoid arrest. In his flight he surprises a girl who has been eavesdropping. She tells him she is Marie Duchamps, waiting maid to Mlle. de Montreuil, and that *mademoiselle* wishes him to escort her to the queen at Blois.

They escape from the convent and lose their way. While resting, they hear the password given to the patrol by two horsemen, who discuss Cardillac's escape and the search being made for him. Marie makes known her intention of going to Blois alone. Cardillac objects. She threatens him with a dagger, but finds he is wounded. He faints, and she tells the patrol the wounded man is her husband. The patrol lets them pass, and they cross the Loire beyond pursuit.

They proceed to the farm of Maloche, where Cardillac introduces Marie as a family friend desiring to take service with the queen. Maloche learns at Blois of Cardillac's escapade, and, fearing for his own safety, threatens to betray them. Marie reveals her identity as the daughter of the Duc de Montreuil, and departs for Blois, while Cardillac, after binding Maloche to secrecy, goes to Loches, which he enters to find himself a popular hero.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE ARCH-PLOTTER OF THE KINGDOM.



DOZEN listeners heard the question and the reply, and the news spread like the incoming tide on the shallow sands of the Normandy coast. "Cardillac—Cardillac!" passed from lip to lip, and men and women came running from every direction to catch a glimpse of this youth whom the king wanted, and was willing to pay his own ransom to secure him.

"M. de Cardillac, I shall consider it a great honor to be permitted to escort you to the gates of the palace," said the officer.

As Cardillac rode up the steep and winding street, the crowd on either side

of the way increased as if the bugles were calling each individual from every corner of the town, and cheer after cheer arose as the tired horse made its ascent. Cardillac blushed like a schoolgirl and, with the natural politeness and grace of a Gascon, he waved salutation to the enthusiastic multitude, but said to the officer, when the gates were closed upon him, and he had dismounted from his horse:

"By our Lady of Loches, I'd rather meet a cavalry attack, against as many enemies, than ride the same distance among such jubilant friends."

The officer laughed, gave the horse in charge of a stableman, and sent word to the Duc de Montreuil that Cardillac awaited his commands.

It happened that the duke had not yet arisen from his bed. He sent, however,

* This story began in *THE CAVALIER* for October, 1908

a cordial welcome to the young man, requested him to deliver to the messenger any letter he might carry, and invited him to breakfast half an hour later.

When, at last, Cardillac was summoned to the breakfast-room he found an apartment small in size, but delightful in situation, giving a view over the rooftops of the town, up and down the valley of the Indre, and away across the forest to the east. A table had been set for two, as was the case at that memorable supper in the duke's palace at Paris. When the duke entered he grasped Cardillac warmly by the hand.

"My brave lad," he said, "I can never repay my indebtedness to you."

"Don't be too sure of that," laughed the ambitious youth; which remark passed unnoticed, for the nobleman's mind was concentrated on one subject alone.

"My daughter, then, has not come with you?"

"No. She went last night to the château at Blois, and this morning is doubtless in waiting upon her majesty."

"Ah!" said the duke, with contracted brow. "I wish she were here in Loches, but Thérèse is very determined—very determined, and loyal to the core. Sit down, my boy; I am sure you are hungry. Tell me all about it."

For some reason, which is not mentioned in any chronicles of the time, Cardillac omitted several particulars of his night's excursion, and ignored one or two events that followed after. He said nothing of his fainting and loss of blood; nothing of the repast on the south side of the Loire; nothing of the good night at the farm manor near Blois, but he mentioned his compact with *mademoiselle* for the release of the queen, saying nothing, however, of any reward he expected. The duke's brow clouded when he came to this question of her majesty's projected escape.

"*Mademoiselle* told me, my lord, that I was to consult with the authorities in this castle regarding what had already been done, and counseled me to form my own plans accordingly."

For a time the duke did not reply, but his countenance showed that some trouble agitated his mind.

"I am in deep apprehension regarding that matter," he said at last. "Scheme

after scheme has been formed, without the necessary forethought, it seems to me, and one after another has ended disastrously. The Duc d'Epéron, commander of the queen's forces, is an admirable general, rightly advised; but I fear his impetuous son, the Archbishop of Toulouse, on whom the sanctity of his high and sacred office sits but lightly, will yet carry us all to destruction with his headstrong zeal. There is no doubt that the authorities at Tours are fully on the alert. Our garrison here is permeated with their spies, and they seem to learn of what is suggested before the plan is carried out. As a result, some of our men have been captured and executed.

"At the present moment my anxiety is intense, for the castle is in my charge. The Duc d'Epéron and his son, the Archbishop of Toulouse, have been absent for three days, and during that time I have received no word from them. The duke, proud of his reputation as the best swordsman in France, cannot be made to see that such a thing as personal danger exists. He therefore takes risks which no man, commander of so important a garrison as ours, should accept, and some day he will be overpowered and captured. With the father so venturesome, you may understand that there is little advantage in speaking warningly to the son.

"They are both under the influence of Rucellai, Abbé of Ligny, who is an Italian, and a born concoctor of futile conspiracies. Rucellai is an adherent and a favorite of his countrywoman, the queen-mother, and knowing him therefore to possess her majesty's confidence, it is but natural that the commander of her forces should place great confidence in the abbé.

"The plots of Rucellai are as intricate and subtle as an Italian's mind, and they have hitherto always ended in catastrophe. On this occasion the duke and the archbishop have gone with Rucellai personally to superintend its execution, but I fear they may attend an execution of their own. I am awaiting with great anxiety their return, or some news of their adventure.

"If we continue this inane pestering of the queen's jailers, the inevitable result will be that De Luynes shall order

her executed in the courtyard, or perhaps assassinated in her apartments, which are under those where the Duc de Guise met his fate. She is lodged in a sinister building, De Cardillac, and I fear that Italian subtlety will be met by French brutality."

"Pertaining to this latest plot, my lord, I am a messenger of evil omen. The garrulous lieutenant who was to escort your daughter to Blois told us that a conspiracy had been unmasked, and that two of the queen's ladies in waiting had been arrested and imprisoned. To take their place your daughter was hurriedly commanded into attendance."

"You think," said the duke anxiously, "that they had no suspicion of her quality?"

"None in the least; and I further believe," cried the young man, with increased enthusiasm, "that her arrival in the queen's entourage will introduce some common sense into that assemblage."

The duke's brow cleared, and his eyes lightened.

"Yes. Thérèse, from the time she was a little girl, ruled all who came near her, and I myself have often been astonished at the sedate wisdom of that sprightly creature. She made no complaint, I suppose, of her journey's hardness through the forest?"

"Oh, not the least. She enjoyed every hour of it, especially after our supper at midnight, for she had been compelled to leave the convent before their late hour for dinner, and from twelve noon to twelve night is rather a long fast.

"Luckily I had filled my saddle-bags with an excellent repast furnished by the innkeeper at Beaugency, and so our journey was carried through with little hardship beyond what the forest had to offer.

"Nevertheless, were it not for *mademoiselle's* resource and quick wit I could not have brought our trip to a successful conclusion."

"It cheers my old heart to hear you speak so eulogistically of my dear child, and I recognize that your generosity is equal to your bravery. Yet I wish Thérèse had come to me, for if anything happens to the Duc d'Epemon I shall be commander of the queen's forces, despite the fact that I am a statesman

rather than a warrior. If, therefore, De Luynes discovers that my daughter is held prisoner with the queen, he has me at a double disadvantage, with both my daughter and my royal mistress in his power."

"We must the sooner release them, my lord."

"True, true, but that is easier said than done; and if this meddlesome Italian continues to spin out his fantastic designs, and is backed by the commander of the forces, the inevitable result will be a tragedy. Although I realize quite as fully as does the Duc d'Epemon the immediate necessity for releasing the queen, I also see the danger of stratagems that are continually brought to naught, which exasperate our enemies without effecting anything for our own friends.

"When some days ago news arrived that you had succeeded in spiriting away my daughter from the convent, and that De Luynes, with the resources of France at his disposal, had not captured you, I proposed to D'Epemon that we should wait until you arrived at Loches, for I supposed that sooner or later you would report to me.

"I suggested that then, as you were young, and had proven yourself competent to cope with forces almost overwhelming, we should transfer to you the task of releasing the queen. D'Epemon seemed favorable at first, but Rucellai would not hear of it, and speedily resumed his influence over the duke's mind, an influence which I hoped had been shaken by the Italian's numerous failures. So, you see, the same thought occurred to both my daughter's mind and my own. If I understand rightly, it is your intention to make Montrichard your base of operations?"

"Yes, my lord. Every man in Montrichard is my friend, and I have established two lines of communication with Blois: neither perfect, of course, and neither to be used except in cases of emergency. Then, I am perfectly acquainted with Montrichard and the country round about, and I consider it much better as headquarters than a spot like Loches for whatever plan I may adopt, since Loches, safe as it may be, is alive, as you admit, with spies."

"I think, *monsieur*, you are quite in the right and, if I may venture a suggestion, it is this: You have entered the castle amid great acclaim. I thought, until I had your message, the clamor meant the return of D'Epernon and the archbishop. The news that you are here is doubtless already traveling to Blois, and it may be in Paris by to-morrow. It will seem perfectly natural that you should seek refuge in Loches, and they are likely to take it for granted that you will not soon quit so secure a sanctuary.

"As I am within these walls, it will also appear probable that by some means or other you have placed my daughter under my protection, and your public entry alone will seem to these crafty persons merely a ruse to delude them into the belief that she is elsewhere. An immediate consequence of this is that the search for you will stop.

"I therefore recommend that you secretly leave Loches to-night, and return to Montrichard. I shall have it given forth that I have appointed you my secretary; and as I work in my own suite of apartments here, and appear seldom in public, this statement will doubtless be credited, and my appointment taken as simple gratitude for what you have done.

"But your great security is that no one will believe you foolhardy enough to leave Loches while the hue and cry for you is abroad in the land. Now, I ask the privilege of paying you two thousand pistoles instead of the one I suggested at first."

"You are very generous, my lord duke, but I cannot accept more than the exact amount stipulated; and, indeed, I feel that *mademoiselle*, rather than myself, is deserving of the money. Your suggestion, regarding the method of my return to Montrichard, is not only an excellent one in itself, but it relieves me from the embarrassment of appearing again before this effervescent mob which appears to make up the population of Loches."

"Very good, *monsieur*; and I beg to say that the more I see of you the more pleased I am with your capacity. I wish we had others like you in high places within this fortress. If agreeable to you, I propose two o'clock to-morrow morning

as the hour of your departure, the same hour that we left Paris together."

"At two o'clock I shall be ready, my lord duke."

CHAPTER XXVII.

INTO THE ENEMY'S CITADEL.

THREE months later De Cardillac sat in the hospitable dining-room of the Tête Noire at Montrichard, the victim of black despair. All his efforts had been nullified by Italian *finesse*. The ever-fertile Rucellai had evolved *brouillon* after *brouillon*, each one proving more unworkable than those that had gone before. At last Cardillac came to the conclusion that the good Abbé of Ligny was either in the pay of De Luynes or was feathering his own nest by the money the infatuated Duc d'Epernon bestowed upon him as capital for carrying out his machinations. Cardillac communicated his suspicions to the Duc de Montreuil, who made careful investigations, but came to the conclusion that the Florentine was honest enough and loyal enough, but merely an enthusiastic conspirator.

The result of all this folly was that the garrison at Blois had been increased by over five thousand men. It was almost impossible for a rat to get through the cordon that surrounded the queen in prison. Several times during those three months Cardillac had made his way into Blois, but each time with increased danger to his life.

His chief reason for performing these dangerous journeys was the delight of seeing Mlle. de Montreuil on her balcony; to play "Romeo and Juliet" in dumb show. On each occasion, by means of the twine, he had received down and sent up a written message. The last document that went up to the balcony he considered most important, for it requested *mademoiselle* to obtain from the queen, under her sign manual, an order for Rucellai to cease his plots on her behalf, and a command to the Duc d'Epernon to furnish no more aid to the Italian conspirator. Cardillac added as a postscript that if Thérèse could persuade her majesty to order D'Epernon to imprison the active abbé this would be

so much to the good. Cardillac was quite certain Thérèse would accomplish this necessary task; but now, to his dismay, he found himself completely fenced out of Blois.

He had never used Maloche as a means of communication with the château, neither had *mademoiselle*; but he had visited the farmer once a month and paid down a handsome instalment in gold. The peasant had kept his word, and respected the oath he had taken, but Cardillac never recovered his belief in the farmer's good faith. Now, however, grown reckless through despondency, he resolved to adventure himself under the mercies of Maloche, and so, one dark autumn night, he rode northward to the farm.

"Maloche," he said, "I am going to double your stipend, and here is your increased portion."

The farmer grunted, but gave no thanks for this new generosity.

"They are tightening things up more and more in Blois," said Maloche, "and soon I expect they will no longer allow me to cart my vegetables into that town. It is a dangerous business, M. de Cardillac, that you have got me into, and what profit is gold if a man loses his head?"

"Oh, you won't lose your head," returned the young man carelessly, "so don't be disheartened. They'll merely hang you. No such aristocratic exit as decapitation awaits you, so listen to me. You will go in to-morrow and see your daughter privately. Tell her—what is quite true—that I am a lover of Marie Duchamps. Ask her to arrange that I may have a word or two in secret with this girl. I have enjoyed no speech with her for three months, and I weary for the sight of her."

"How do you propose to enter Blois, M. de Cardillac?"

"I will enter it in your cart, dressed as one of your sons."

"Humph!" grunted the farmer, in no way delighted at this new peril he was called to face through the unreasonableness of amorous youth.

The farmer brought back from Blois the intelligence that if Cardillac were patient enough to wait three days, what he wished might possibly be accomplished. On the third day his daughter's

young man would be on guard at the outer door of the queen's corridor, and, although none of the queen's attendants were permitted to enter this corridor, the guard for the moment would turn his back, and Cardillac might enjoy the felicitation of embracing Marie Duchamps if he lingered not too long about it.

The three days passed with exasperating slowness, but at last this yokel, who was apparently a farmer's son, entered the château under the guidance of Phyllis Maloche. He was taken surreptitiously along passage and corridor, and commanded to stand in an embrasure some ten feet away from the perturbed guard, who, being a lover himself, may be supposed to have had compassion upon others in the same condition.

The farmer's daughter whispered a few words to the sentinel, then knocked at the door of the queen's apartments, opened it, and disappeared; while the guard, ignoring Cardillac's presence, paced moodily up and down the corridor, keeping close to the windows, that any one looking up from the outside might see he was on the alert. Presently Marie and her guide appeared. Cardillac dramatically held out his arms, and *mademoiselle*, who had been told by the girl that her lover wished to see her, enacted the part to perfection. She had on many occasions assumed the rôle in private theatricals, and now did herself justice; nevertheless, the fervor of Cardillac proved embarrassing.

"You are overacting," she whispered.

"I am not acting at all," he replied.

"Such ardor as yours is impossible in any country, especially France, where all belief in true love has long since departed."

"Not from your heart, Thérèse."

"Oh, never mind my heart! What is it you came for?"

"Did the queen sign that paper ordering the imprisonment of Rucellai?"

"She signed a document ordering D'Epernon, his son, and the abbé to cease their troubling, but she will not permit Rucellai to be imprisoned."

"Well, half a loaf if we can get no more. Do you carry the message with you?"

"Surely, everywhere I go."

"Then, during my next delicious embrace, pass it to me if you can."

"Don't distract my attention too much," laughed *mademoiselle*. "Here it is. God send you may not be searched on leaving the palace. And now, what chance for the queen? She is becoming irritable and difficult to deal with, because of the long delay."

"That's the fool Rucellai's fault. I should not advise any attempt to be made before next February."

The girl gave an exclamation of dismay.

"The queen will fret herself to death before that time."

"When all plots cease, discipline will relax, and then something may be accomplished. Now it is madness to try."

The guard was giving signs of uneasiness by coughing loudly, and at last Maloche's daughter timidly approached the pair.

"I am sorry, *monsieur*, but you must part. It is very dangerous."

"I know it," said Cardillac, looking full in the laughing eyes of *mademoiselle*. "And now two more, with no acting in them."

"One," said *mademoiselle*; but he took three, explaining hastily, as he tore himself away, that this was the sum total of two and one.

Cardillac was led by Phyllis Maloche through the mazes of the palace to the servants' door, and there, unsearched and unmolested, he mounted the farmer's cart, was driven down into the town, across the bridge, and on to the farm, old Maloche speaking not one word during the journey.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A CONFERENCE DECLINED.

AT the farm Cardillac mounted his horse and set off for Montrichard, meaning to dine there and push on to Loches that night, with the warrant in his pocket that would render harmless the future activities of Rucellai, Abbé of Ligny. But when he reached the Tête Noire his plans were disarranged by a cordial greeting from the father of the girl whom, that morning, he had so lovingly embraced.

An unwonted red mounted his cheek as he remembered that not once during the brief interview had either of them mentioned this distinguished nobleman of France. Even with *mademoiselle* the sentiment of youth had for the moment obliterated her daughterly affection.

"My lord, I am delighted to meet you, and little thought to find you in this humble hostelry. I have just arrived from Blois, where I had the pleasure this morning of being received by *mademoiselle*, your daughter."

A look of amazement overspread the usually impassive face of the Duc de Montreuil.

"What you say shows how undependable are the reports of spies. We have been told that Blois is impreguably sealed."

"The spies are quite correct, my lord, and, so far as is humanly practicable, such is the condition of the town; but I told you I had two methods of communication with the château. One having failed me after repeated attempts, I tried the other, and it proved so successful that the second avenue brought me to the outside of her majesty's door, and gave me the privilege of a few words with *mademoiselle*."

"Does her imprisonment seem to tell upon her, *monsieur*?"

"No; I thought she looked very well indeed. A little flushed, perhaps, and anxious, naturally, and doubtless troubled. She tells me the queen is becoming more and more querulous and difficult to deal with, but yet, as it seemed to me, in the most radiant health. By my first line of communication I had ventured the request that she use her influence with the queen to obtain a document which would put an end to the intrigues of our reverend father, the Abbé of Ligny. From her own hands I received this morning the document in question."

Cardillac drew from his doublet the royal warrant and presented it to the Duc de Montreuil, who perused it with the habitual carefulness of a statesman.

"You intend this to reach the hands of the Duc d'Epéron?"

"Yes, my lord; and for such purpose I entrust it to yours. I do not for a moment question that the Duc d'Epéron, commander of the queen's forces, will see

that this order is obeyed as faithfully, though it comes from a prison, as if it came from the throne."

"Of a surety," concurred De Montreuil.

"Nevertheless, my lord duke, I implore you to use your influence with D'Epéron, that he may take care there is no attempt on the part of the abbé to evade the restrictions herein set down. An Italian obeys a command with mental reservations."

The duke shrugged his shoulders.

"An Italian may *give* a command with mental reservations. What if the queen privately countermands this document in a communication to the abbé himself? I know of old she had the utmost confidence in him."

"Well, thank Heaven, for a month or two she can get no message sent from Blois except through me."

The duke laid the parchment on the table.

"You shall yourself present this expression of royal pleasure to the Duc d'Epéron, and any observations you make to his lordship, the commander, I shall support with all the influence I possess. I am come from Loches with orders to take you back with me."

"For what purpose, my lord?"

"That the Duc d'Epéron and his son, the Archbishop of Toulouse, may benefit by a conversation with you. I thought it best to let you know the particulars of the position. I am pleased to announce that the Duc d'Epéron, and more especially his son, have completely lost faith in the projects of the Abbé Rucellai, and so, even without this document, I think you will find the way clear. I have spoken on various occasions to the Duc d'Epéron regarding you, but I regret that the influence with which you credit me has not been sufficient to overcome his disbelief in your good faith."

"In what respect is my good faith impugned?"

"The duke knows you went to Paris as a partizan of the king, and he fears you may be in secret a minion of De Luynes."

"That seems an improbable hypothesis, my lord."

"Yes, it is; but D'Epéron considers himself very shrewd. He thinks that once my escape from Paris became

known, De Luynes found himself embarrassed by the imprisonment of my daughter in the convent. You were, therefore, his emissary for her release. In other words, he did not know what to do with her, and so induced you to take an unwelcome burden off his hands."

"How, then, does he account for my taking service with you, my lord—or does he know the circumstances in which we left Paris together?"

"Yes; I told him all that, but, with his superior intelligence, he believes that you were actually set upon me, to accomplish my assassination. He thinks you have hoodwinked me, and he cannot believe that, except with the connivance of De Luynes and his confederates, you could have escaped alone and unattended through a country filled with king's men—as is the case with the Beaugency district. D'Epéron's own ineffective attempts to enter Blois have caused him to believe that neither you nor my daughter could have done so without the cognizance of De Luynes. Therefore he wishes to question you face to face, that he may confirm or abolish the conclusions at which he has arrived."

"I shall not go," said Cardillac with decision.

"Why not?"

"I hold no converse with any man, high or low, who disputes my honor."

"But will you not, at my request, defend your honor?"

"No, my lord duke. If the Duc d'Epéron dares say to my face what he has said to you, I will meet him, sword in hand, but not otherwise."

The Duc de Montreuil smiled.

"My lad, I should not be too confident touching the outcome of such an encounter. He is willing to meet you in fair speech, and I give you my assurance that such a conference is safer than the other."

"Not my safety, but my honor, is in question. I am as proud as the Duc d'Epéron, and my lineage is as ancient as his. No peaceful meeting between us is possible after what he has said."

"But, De Cardillac, will you not listen to me? Will you not accept my advice?"

"No, my lord duke. I say it regretfully, but on this point I am immovable."

"Look you, De Cardillac, you are at the beginning of what I hope will be a most glorious career. Your qualities are those I most admire, and your fortunes I am willing to further with my power."

"I thank you, my lord duke, and hope in the future to enlist your favor."

"Very well. You have broken completely with the king's party. In that direction your career is at an end. Is it wise, then, to block promotion through the only other avenue open to you by refusing the request of the Duc d'Épernon, who asks you to come to him?"

"My lord duke, after I have released the queen and handed her over to the Duc d'Épernon, I turn to the south. I am done with both parties. My experience teaches me that there are mostly knaves on one side, and fools on the other. I ask favor from neither party."

"You estimate De Luynes a knave?"

"I do; and D'Épernon a fool, and you may tell him so."

The duke smiled, but gave Cardillac no hint regarding his own opinion.

"Ah, Cardillac, at your age I was similarly certain of everything. Now my judgments appear to have liquefied. I find no man completely a fool, and no man completely a knave."

The duke took up the parchment from the table, folded it, and placed it in his pocket.

"I shall rest here for the night, and deliver this to the commander to-morrow. And now, De Cardillac, you must dine with me."

"Not so, my lord duke. It is my turn, and you are my guest at mine inn. I can assure you of a more creditable dinner than you might expect, and an exhilarating wine from Vouvray, whose bin I am gradually consuming."

The duke assented, and Cardillac took his leave, mounted the stairs, washed away the traces of his journey, and dressed himself with some care.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE TEST OF THE SWORD.

THE first of winter's fierce storms smote down upon Touraine, coming westward from the Atlantic, and across the Bay of Biscay. The rain

raged upon the Black Head Inn, and the wind rattled the stout shutters. The descending deluge and the roaring wind but accentuated the jollity within. A great fire blazed on the broad hearth of the tavern's long dining-room, which held a single main table and several smaller ones.

At the head of the chief table sat the radiant De Cardillac, with his jovial friends, the silk-spinners, up and down each side. Cardillac was host for the evening, and the Vouvray he had commended flowed freely. Down the long center of the table lay many strands of finely spun silk of various colors, and the while the landlord, stout of body and rosy of face, saw that every flagon was kept full.

De Cardillac held forth eloquently on the merits of the various silks of the world, and the superiority of the Mont-richard silk-spinners and weavers to all mankind elsewhere—a sentiment that was received with great applause and the pounding of flagons on the table.

"As you all know, my friends, I offered a prize, divided into three portions, for the three best, slimmest, and strongest cords of silk, and to-night we celebrate the accomplishment of the task. I now sit in the seat of judgment, and I trust my award will be received as impartial, for I have scrupulously tested every strand submitted to me."

"Hurrah for the judge!" cried one of the spinners, and "Hurrah!" they all shouted in unison, drinking heartily to Cardillac, who bowed in response. "And I would say," continued the spinner who had spoken first, "that the verdict will be a just one, and this I announce before pronouncement is made. Any man who disputes it will meet my fist in his face."

The crowd clamored and drank again. Cardillac sat silent, his eyes glowing upon the colored strands of silk.

"Silence for the judge!" demanded one of the company, and the noise subsided. Cardillac rose to his feet.

"Landlord, fill the flagons," he said, "and then sit down. I cannot have this speech interrupted even by the pouring out of wine."

The landlord obeyed.

"Now, craftsmen in the most delicate and beautiful of all industries, I have,

with great care, tested these various cords, and the result is, where all are so excellent, I cannot say that any one strand excels the other. Therefore, with your permission, I shall not divide the amount I have promised between so great a number of persons, but I shall take that amount, and deliver a similar sum to each man of you, the only condition being that I am to have and to hold these cords, seemingly fragile as a spider's spinning, yet strong as the steel of Toledo."

At this there was tremendous cheering, the silk-spinners rising to their feet, and making the blackened rafters ring. Such generosity had never before been known in Montrichard, for each spinner was to receive in a lump more than he could earn by a long winter's work. In the midst of the uproar caused by the storm without and the cheers within, Cardillac saw that the innkeeper was gesticulating, and trying to make himself heard.

"What is wrong with you?" he demanded.

"*Monsieur*, there is some one knocking at the door. Lord pity any one out a night like this. Shall we admit them?"

"Certainly," replied Cardillac. "'Tis not a night for a dog to be abroad, let alone a man. Comrades, to your seats, and so that no stranger may intrude upon our mysteries, excuse me while I gather these cords and conceal them in my room. I pay the awards to-morrow morning, when my head is clear. To-night the wine flows within, as the rain pours without. Let the exhilaration of the one nullify the inconvenience of the other. When I return I shall relate to you more of my adventures, which you were good enough to commend the other night."

Quickly he gathered the silk from the table, and disappeared up the stairs. When he returned and took his seat again, the landlord was ushering in three men heavily cloaked and dripping. Hostlers were hurrying along the passage to attend to the storm-beaten horses outside. Cardillac gave but a glance at the three men, as the landlord took their sodden cloaks and spread them so that they might dry before the fire.

The youngest man, a fine-faced fellow of about thirty, wore a garb difficult to

place, it being partly clerical, partly military. The next eldest, a foreigner with a crafty, furtive look, was undeniably a priest, and clothed as such. The oldest, the only one of the group whose hair was gray, stood, tall and well-formed, a man, despite his age, in the very pink of condition. His calling was stamped indelibly upon him: erect, gaunt, a man of iron nerve, a soldier without hazard. He seemed leader of the party, and gave short, curt orders to the obsequious innkeeper, whose experience told him that the three were gentlemen.

The military man ordered supper and wine; then, bowing to De Cardillac, begged permission for himself and his friends to stand in front of the fire. De Cardillac rose and bowed in return, giving them a Gascon's gesture of welcome, and the three warmed their stiffened fingers at the fire. The stout landlord bustled about with an activity astonishing in a man of his bulk, and set forth, on one of the small tables, an ample meal, with a generous supply of wine.

When all was ready the three strangers sat down to their supper, and consumed it in silence. It seemed as if the rigor of the weather without had penetrated to their bones, freezing that geniality which should always accompany a good meal earned by a long journey.

In striking contrast to this gloomy trio sat the large party at the long table. Cardillac entertained his guests by telling story after story. He related tales of adventure, current in the land of Gascony, that were new to his hearers, and upon occasion he broke forth into song, amid generous applause. If the storm raged without, harmony prevailed within, at least till the moment when the senior of the strangers intervened.

Several times when the hilarity had become boisterous, the gray-haired man looked over his shoulder with a frown upon his brow. If Cardillac saw this sign of disapproval, he paid no attention to it, believing that in a public caravansary a man was entitled to such entertainment as pleased him best, as long as he infringed none of the rules of the house, and paid his score when it was presented. One anecdote having been received with especial favor, the tall stranger turned on his bench, and said:

"Sir, you may have observed that one, at least, of those sitting round this table wears the cloth of the church. For your further information I may impart to you that another, though not in strictly clerical garb, occupies a position in Christian council equal to that of any peer of the realm. I, myself, am a serious man and a religious. Although we are the latest comers, it is not meet that our ears should be offended by such ribaldry as you have just pronounced, in a public room."

In response to this, Cardillac inclined his head very low, then brought it up to a straightness which he always assumed when his pride was touched. He spoke slowly in reply:

"Sir, it is my proudest boast that I am a faithful and devoted son of the church, and a respecter of all who act under her authority. Therefore, I should be the last man in France to give utterance to a syllable that might not be heard with propriety, even by the most devout. The incident with which I regaled my friends here was told to me, in the first place, by as good a priest as ever read his breviary."

"For nearly an hour," said the elder man quietly, "we have been compelled to listen to your frivolity. Sir, you are very juvenile, and there are older heads than yours around your table who should not have left to me the task of reproof."

"Reproof?" echoed De Cardillac. "Reproof? May I persuade you, sir, to reconsider that word?"

"The word seems adequate to the circumstances. With your permission, therefore, we will allow it to remain."

"It is with deep regret, *monsieur*, that I find myself unable to grant that permission."

Cardillac rose to his feet, and continued in measured tones:

"If, unasked, you will assume the rôle of schoolmaster—your companions being priests, and, therefore, unequipped with any rod of correction to make a reproof effective—I now request you to use your instrument of coercion, or else instantly withdraw the word to which I have taken exception."

This ultimatum was delivered with a gracious inclination of the head, as Cardillac removed his rapier from its scab-

bard. The action caused some of his guests to move themselves to the other side of the table with more celerity than dignity.

The elder man courteously acknowledged his opponent's declaration, and drew forth his own blade. During the dialogue, which was carried on in a low, conversational tone, the priest bent his eyes on the table, never looking up. The youngest of the party leaned back with an air of indifference, although at times a fleeting smile illumined his handsome countenance. Neither of the two spoke, nor made any effort to arrange a compromise.

The quarrel had risen so unexpectedly, and upon such slight excuse that Cardillac, somewhat belated, as he admitted to himself, began to think, and stood there irresolute, sword in hand. Suddenly he remembered his mission, and the national cause that hung upon his success, and the personal issue involved in the completion of his task. How was he to know that these strangers were not disguised assassins sent by De Luynes?

He stood practically at their mercy, for his own friends, although in the majority, were unarmed, and even if they possessed weapons could make little use of them. Yet he had allowed himself to be drawn into this brawl, and had actually been the first to show steel; so, whatever ensued, investigation would show that he had been the aggressor, changing the issue from one of words to one of weapons.

Mentally dubbing himself an impetuous fool, he tightened his grip on the hilt of his rapier, and, remembering how good a swordsman he was, would have entered the conflict untroubled, were it not for his fear of a rearward attack from the other two, when he had disarmed or wounded his opponent.

The older man stood with the knuckles of his left hand pressed against his hip; his right rested on the hilt of his sword, whose point impinged upon the floor, like a walking-stick sported by a dandy. He noted Cardillac's hesitation, regarding him with a quizzical look, while his lip curled slightly, giving his face a disdainful expression.

Cardillac, seeing this, roused himself from his momentary reverie, resentment

at the unwarranted intrusion rising up-
permost in his mind.

"At your pleasure, *monsieur*," said the young man.

"I await yours," replied the elder.

An unaccustomed thrill traveled up Cardillac's right arm as the sword-blades lay together in mid-air. He was conscious of a strength behind his opponent's weapon that he had never before encountered, but more ominous was the skill with which his own steel was held nerveless and immovable.

There was nothing spectacular about the contest; no clashing of metal, no thrusts, and, consequently, no parrying; but it seemed to the spectators that the two blades had become welded together, and that neither combatant could draw them apart.

But Cardillac was no spectator, ignorant of fence. He considered himself an expert at this play, but never before had he met a man whose sword seemed to be a magician's wand that, at a touch, completely paralyzed his own blade. However, it occurred to him that this was a game at which he could hold out indefinitely; could come to no conclusion, and was as nullifying for his opponent as for himself.

Skill, however great, could not, in the long run, take the place of strength, and as Cardillac was the younger man, he must eventually win, even against a trick so unusual. So they held grimly on, each man standing his ground, giving way not an inch.

Suddenly the stranger's blade seemed to lose grip, and its point, like the sting of a serpent, passed under the quillon of Cardillac's guard, and deftly pricked his hand, causing a momentary relaxation of his grip. Next instant Cardillac's sword was whirled through the air, its point stuck in the timbered ceiling, with the pommel swaying to and fro in space like a pendulum.

CHAPTER XXX.

AN ALLY OF NEITHER.

ONCE more the stranger sported his weapon after the fashion of a dandy's cane, his open palm resting on the pommel, his cynical smile

turned upon his discomfited antagonist, contemptuously pitiful, as a grown man regards the blundering of an untaught boy.

Cardillac did not move, but placed his arms akimbo, and stood there defenseless, although he might easily have reached forward and pulled his rapier from the ceiling, for the other was in no attitude instantly to prevent this.

"I think, sir," proposed the stranger, deferentially, as if putting forward a statement which might be disputed, "that your life lies at my mercy."

"Take it," said Cardillac, indifferently; but, although he spoke nonchalantly, chagrin made his heart burn within him.

He remembered his unjustifiable fear that the other two would interfere, and although the thought was unspoken, he was humiliated that it had occurred to him. Neither of the other two had moved from his place: there was no need for them to do so. Cardillac had been helpless as a child from the first.

"I have no wish to take it, *monsieur*. Man's life decreases in value as man increases in years. My own life I hold as of small worth, but existence now opens to you its most advantageous period. I would, therefore, gladly bestow it on you, unless you compel me to deprive you of it."

"What are your conditions, *monsieur*?"

"There is but one condition, which is that you drink a toast with me."

"I am willing, so long as I am not asked to admit that any lady is more beautiful than she whom I have the honor to serve."

"There you see, *monsieur*, you prove my contention regarding the value of life. You would die rather than proclaim another fairer than the divinity you worship. I shall put your loyalty to no such test, for the beauty of woman is a subject indifferent to me."

"Very well, *monsieur*, then I am prepared to drink with you."

One of Cardillac's friends, delighted to see that wine, rather than blood, was to flow, filled the young man's flagon and handed it to him. The gentleman in semimilitary garb did the same favor for the elder man, who, raising his measure aloft, cried:

"I give you His Most Gracious Majesty King Louis, the thirteenth of that name!"

Cardillac gently laid down his filled cup upon the table.

"*Monsieur*," he said, "the number thirteen is unlucky."

"How so?"

"For me, I mean. I cannot drink to the king."

"Well, *monsieur*, you seem difficult to please, and apparently would force me to extremes—a course I am loath to follow in this instance—therefore, I shall amend my proposition. As you do not care to accept my toast, give me one of your own. If I refuse, then it seems we are quits, and so again your life is spared. But you must propose a serious toast, suitable for a serious and aged man. I refuse to drink to any young lady."

"Sir, I could not have encountered a more generous opponent, whose nobility is only equaled by his skill of hand and strength of arm. I give you, sir, the queen, wrongfully imprisoned by her enemies! I ask you all to stand and drink to her speedy release."

As he made this request, he looked toward his friends, who were instantly on their feet; but there arose, also, the two strangers seated at the smaller table.

"The queen!" cried his late antagonist, raising aloft his goblet. "Health and liberty to the queen, and confusion to her enemies!"

The stranger put down his drained tankard, and extended his hand.

"M. de Cardillac, I am gratified to meet you. Allow me to introduce myself."

"My lord, there is no need. Your sword has been your sponsor. You must be the Duc d'Epéron, commander of the queen's forces."

For the first time since he arrived, the duke laughed, then, turning to his two companions, he introduced the military-clerical man as his son, the Archbishop of Toulouse, and the other as Rucellai, the Very Reverend Abbé of Ligny.

"As a man of peace," said the abbé, "I beg to be allowed to draw this sword from the ceiling, and restore it to its owner."

"I fear such a restitution is not in the interests of peace, abbé," commented the

duke, "for although our contest seemed unexciting, M. de Cardillac is nevertheless one of the best swordsmen I have ever met. And now, M. de Cardillac, when you are at liberty, I should like you to join our party. We have come over from Loches especially to see you. I suppose the landlord can give us lodging for the night?"

The landlord assured the duke that he had ample accommodation, but feared none of his rooms were worthy of holding so distinguished a guest. His landlordship replied that he was an old campaigner, who looked upon the comforts of an inn as unnecessary luxuries.

The silk-spinners took their departure, going out, not by the front door, but down into the cellar, with their lighted lanterns, and so into underground passages until they came to their dwellings in the chalk cliff, thus avoiding the bitterness of a winter night. The small table was drawn up nearer to the fire; the landlord provided an ample supply of wine, and the four men seated themselves in front of the blazing logs. The commander of the queen's forces was the first to speak, and he addressed Cardillac.

"When the Duc de Montreuil told me you refused a conference, except at the sword's point, I resolved on the first opportunity to oblige you, even if I was compelled to take a disagreeable journey for that purpose."

"My lord, I apologize for my boorishness in disobeying your command, and regret that I have put you to the inconvenience of a journey to Montrichard."

"Oh, that's no matter. Our ride hither has settled two questions, which, perhaps, would not have been resolved so well at Loches. The first pertains to your swordsmanship, and the second to your loyalty, which, as my friend De Montreuil was injudicious enough to disclose to you, I doubted. For such disbelief I now apologize. In these troublous times true men should hold no misunderstandings with one another, and I trust all is now clear between us."

"So far as I am concerned, that is the case," replied Cardillac.

"Good. Well, we wish to enlist your assistance in liberating the queen, and De Montreuil has for some time proclaimed your merits, which I did not ac-

cept at their proper valuation. We have been using every effort toward the queen's escape, but up to the present time have been unsuccessful. Now a new difficulty has arisen, coming from a most unexpected quarter; a quarter so exalted that our criticism is stricken dumb. The queen has caused to be sent to me an order forbidding the Very Reverend the Abbé of Ligny from making any further efforts on her behalf. The queen, poor lady, has been these months past cut off from all communication with her followers. She is surrounded by women, and, naturally, knows nothing of what is going on outside her prison walls. I dare say that the failure of our efforts has increased the rigor of her imprisonment, and this doubtless is partly to blame for the unfortunate proclamation—if I dare call it so, in all loyalty. In addition to this, some one must have poisoned the mind of her majesty against the Abbé of Ligny."

"My lord duke, excuse my interruption, but if her majesty is cut off from all communication with the outside world, how could she know anything of the abbé's doings?"

"Of course, my dear De Cardillac, a certain percentage of news filters through, but we have reason to doubt the genuineness of this proclamation. The signature certainly resembles that of the queen, but there are some expert forgers in the other camp, and the blow is so unexpected, and so contrary to her majesty's own interests, that without corroboration we hesitate to act upon it."

"From whom did you receive the proclamation?"

"From the Duc de Montreuil himself."

"And from whom did the duke receive it?"

"That he refused to disclose, but he assured me that the document came directly from the queen."

"The Duc de Montreuil would never make such a statement unless he believed it to be true."

"Certainly not. I am well aware that he credits it, but until I know the avenue through which it came, and so can add my own judgment to that of De Montreuil's, I, as commander of the forces, hesitate to act upon it."

"Would you obey the document if you knew it to be genuine?"

"Of a certainty. How can you ask such a question?"

"Because in that case I shall tell you how it came into the Duc de Montreuil's hands."

"You! How can you possibly know anything about it?"

"I gave it to the duke, and asked him to present it to you. I am acquainted with one of the queen's ladies in waiting, and asked her to persuade the queen to sign such a proclamation. I, myself, got the document from the château at Blois, and finding the Duc de Montreuil here on my arrival, did not go through to Loches, as was at first my intention, but gave it instead to him."

"Do you mean to assert," said the Italian, speaking for the first time, and speaking very softly, although there was a dangerous glitter in his eyes, "that it was upon your advice—you, a man unknown in our ranks—that her majesty issued what was practically a sentence of dismissal against one of her most faithful servants?"

"Yes."

"May I ask why? Surely, you feel no personal animus against me?"

"None in the least, reverend father. I took the course, of which doubtless you disapprove, because all your ingenuities had failed. Worse than that, you were keeping the town of Blois on the alert, and thus prevented my success. As well might a man endeavor to extract honey from a beehive, while some one else was irritating the bees with a stick."

The abbé was about to reply, when the Archbishop of Toulouse, his superior, motioned him to continue silent.

"There is little use in arguing the pros and cons of the proclamation," said the archbishop. "Let us talk of the future, rather than of the past. We are here for a practical purpose, M. de Cardillac, and the proposal we offer you is this. You are a man with your way to make in the world. I suppose I may take that for granted?"

"Yes, my lord archbishop."

"You are young, energetic, fearless: exactly the man the Abbé of Ligny needs to carry out his plans. If you return with us to Loches, and take service under

the direction of the abbé. I make no doubt the next project will prove successful."

"I have been told, my lord archbishop, that there are many spies in Loches, and their presence may account for the failure of former schemes for the queen's liberation, as I am sure the plans of the Abbé of Ligny must be well laid. On account of the spies alone I should be compelled to refuse the invitation to Loches."

"Youth is ever confident. Perhaps you scorn my assistance, *monsieur*?" said the abbé placidly.

"Oh, no, reverend father. On any ordinary occasion I should welcome it, but a battle and a plot are two different things. The more men you can secure on your side in a battle, the better; the fewer there are in a plot, the better. In my plot there are two persons, and that is just double the ideal number."

"Young man, tell me your plot. We shall all treat what you say in the utmost confidence."

"My plot consists in transferring her majesty from the château of Blois to the château of Loches."

"But the details, *monsieur*."

"Oh, the details! They are like the weather, and change day by day; often several times a day."

The Duc d'Epemon did not like the trend of the conversation. He thought his lesson in swordsmanship should have taught the young man a little more modesty than he appeared to possess.

"I think, *monsieur*," he said, "you treat the abbé with less consideration than his high office, or his distinguished personal qualifications, deserve."

Cardillac rose to his feet.

"I regret, my lord duke, that what I

have said has produced such an impression upon your mind. I assure both you and the abbé that I meant no disrespect to himself or the company.

"Ah, you may smile, but what I say is strictly true. I am usually very direct in my speech, and no man mistakes my meaning. Here I have made an attempt at verbal fencing, with the same result that followed my measuring swords with you, my lord duke. I shall now speak plainly. I belong to neither faction that divides France. As I told the Duc de Montreuil, I believe there are mostly knaves on one side, and mostly fools on the other."

"You hold a flattering opinion of your country, young man," said the duke.

"Oh, there is nothing wrong with the country. I am referring merely to those in high offices on either side. I refuse, then, to be labeled, and called king's man or queen's man. I am in this contest for Victor de Cardillac, and I am going to fight as Victor de Cardillac orders. I ask no man's assistance, and I will assist no man. I refuse to disclose the particulars of my conspiracies.

"If I succeed, the queen will reach Loches; if I fail, my head will reach the block. It is like to do so in any case, if I fall into the clutches of De Luynes. If I fail, I pay the penalty; if I succeed, I ask no office in the gift of the queen, and no money from the coffers of her supporters. And now, gentlemen, if I have made myself understood, I beg leave to bid you good night."

"Good night," said the Duc d'Epemon shortly. The other two said nothing, and Cardillac, with a comprehensive bow to all three, went up the stairs, and so to bed.

(To be concluded.)

STARS.

MISTS brood over the skies,

Yet from the depths of the blue

The stars, with their tender eyes,

Shine through.

So with the mists of the past—

Ah, but the joys we knew!—

Your eyes shall unto the last

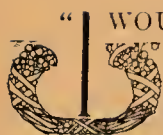
Shine through!

Ross Hamilton.

THE PERFECT VENDETTA.

BY R. J. PEARSALL.

A SHORT STORY.



"WOULDN'T kill you now if I could. Revenge is sweeter for the keeping. What is life! But the time will come— Four beings you will love better than life itself. To take them from you one by one! To be near and talk with you and watch your agony! And then you, too! Ah, I see it! You cannot escape. Twenty years! It is worth waiting for."

In all my years of happy wedded life I had never quite forgotten the renegade's words. And to-day the threat thrust itself aggressively upon my consciousness.

It was absurd that I should still remember it, much more that it should disturb me. When it was uttered, my enemy stood in a prison dock, condemned to fifteen years' imprisonment. Since that time I had circled the globe three times, a homeless, friendless wanderer—corresponding with no one—an atom lost in the sea of humanity. Then, sixteen years ago, I had come home, my *wanderlust* satisfied.

I had married and taken up the quiet life of a country gentleman. Surely it would take the subtlety of Satan himself to discover the adventurer of twenty years ago in me, Arthur Baylor. Even my name was changed. John Drake I had been called then.

Sixteen years of happiness! Believe me, after a man has drifted over the world for years, without money or purpose, he is fitted to appreciate the delights of the most humble, so it be a home.

When he is as fortunate as I, succeeding to an estate just rich enough, to an income just large enough, for happiness,

surrounded by the friends and associations of youth, and with the most perfect woman in the world for a wife, then he must needs be happy.

Sixteen years ago I had come home. One, two, three, four—yes, it had been twenty years. As the twilight thickened I turned toward the house with a smile at my weak fears. "Twenty years." "Four beings you will love better than life itself." If the threat were ever to bear fruit, now was the time.

Suddenly from far off came a long, animal-like cry.

Its direction was indefinite; it might easily have come from the sky above or from any one of the points of the compass. The average man might never have noticed it. But I leaped forward toward the house as though I had seen it burst into flames. It was the revenge cry of the East Indian.

Ethyl had been sitting on the east porch; she rose as I came plunging up, and cried out to know what was the matter.

"The children, wife! Where are they?"

"Why, they're all right. They were, a minute ago." She caught some of my excitement. "Tom, Eunice, Maggie!" As "Here!" and "Coming!" two voices replied, she turned to me. "Why, Art, what's the matter?"

"They are not all right. Tom didn't answer. Tom—Tom—Tom!" My voice echoed dismally back at me, but there was no other response.

"You frighten me, Arthur. He was here only a few minutes ago. What's the matter?"

"I will tell you, but first find Tom. For the love of Heaven, find him!" Eunice and Maggie, the one ten, the

other six years old, appeared. "Eunice, where is Tom?"

"Went up to West's," said Eunice. "Just a minute ago," volunteered Maggie.

Now, as Tom was fourteen, and Ellis West was his particular chum, there was something in the naturalness of this that reassured me.

All at once I had seemed to act irrationally. But I couldn't get rid of my alarm: so, after a few words of reassurance to Ethyl, I started up the road toward the West home, which lay about an eighth of a mile from my own.

Still, such were the mental suggestions of the cry I had heard, that before I reached West's I was running again. I could hardly wait for the door to open. When it did, Mrs. West looked at me as though startled at my appearance.

"Mrs. West," I said, "excuse me, but is Tom here?" I remember thinking how absurd I would appear in her eyes if, after all, there was nothing the matter.

But her reply drove all that out of my head. "I haven't seen him, Mr. Baylor," she said.

"He would be with Ellis," I said, and then I saw Ellis sprawled over a book in the corner of the room. I do not think I said anything more.

I must have sprinted home, for the next instant I was there and running everywhere, calling wildly for Tom.

The house was in confusion, Maggie and Eunice were crying, and my wife was following me distractedly about. But no trace of him could be found. He had disappeared entirely and seemingly simultaneously with that weird, exultant cry in the dark.

After a while I found myself in the library alone with my wife. She was endeavoring to calm me. In a hundred ways the absence of Tom might be explained.

But when I told her of the strange oath of vengeance that had been taken against me, of my premonitions, and of the warning cry, I could see that my earnestness impressed her.

"Oh, Arthur, if something has happened to him—" And she began to cry silently.

Tears from a woman strengthen a

man. I began to consider calmly what was to be done. I went up to West's, thence to Parker's, thence to Reed's, thus disposing of all our neighbors. But nowhere did I find Tom or a trace of him.

I spent a sleepless night. I chafed at the inaction; but what could be done before morning? I retired, but I could not stay in bed. After tossing about for what seemed an eternity, I arose and looked at the clock. It was a little after one. Half-dressed, I stumbled out into the night. There was not a nook nor a corner nor a shadowy spot in the grounds that escaped my scrutiny.

Hours after I came out, I spied a ghostly figure across the lawn. Startled, I hurried toward it.

"Who's there?" I cried, unconsciously using the inflection of the sentry on post, learned well in my old soldier days. The figure turned and hurried toward me, flinging itself into my arms with a sob. It was my wife; she could sleep no more than I.

The next morning at ten I phoned to Rockford, the nearest city of importance, for a detective. He came, and we took all the steps customary in such cases. But through it all the words of that fiend incarnate rang in my ears.

"One by one. You cannot escape." They filled me with a sense of impotence, as if it were Satan himself with whom I was contending.

II.

THREE weeks had nearly passed. I do not wish to be discredited—and will not be; it is a matter of criminal history—when I state that, by some inexplicable agency, my three children had disappeared one by one, leaving never a trace behind.

It was on Monday evening that the first was taken. During the week the whole neighborhood had been searched and the disappearance advertised far and wide, but in vain.

On the following Monday, at dusk, my wife and I were sitting in the library, both making some pretense at reading. Eunice and Maggie were playing about the room. I noticed an unwonted stillness. I looked up. Maggie alone was in the room.

"Maggie," I asked, "where is Eunice?"

"Gone outh," lisped Maggie.

The door was half open. I went through into the parlor. The outside door was ajar. Eunice could not have been gone more than a minute. But when I called, there was no response. It was the story of Tom repeated. She could not be found. My youngest child alone was left.

I had not attempted to conceal the fact that I dreaded some such event as had taken place, and this last disappearance set the neighborhood on fire. The thing was, however, so unaccountable, that there were very few, if any, who attempted to explain the mystery. One of the foremost detectives of the country was engaged from Chicago, but he seemed equally at a loss with myself.

Among the visitors who thronged our home daily was one Mr. Holcomb. He was an old man, with a profusion of long, gray beard, erect of figure and keen of eye.

He lived alone, a little more than a mile from us, but always had been a frequent visitor, and had seemed more than ordinarily fond of the children.

"Mr. Baylor," he said, "you are to be pitied, I know. I certainly sympathize with you, you do not know how much. Tell me, have you no idea about these outrages?"

His sincerity was so apparent that I told him what I had told no one beside the detectives—my suspicions as to the perpetrator. He was deeply affected at the idea of such a diabolic revenge so long cherished.

"If your suspicions are correct, this miscreant will not stop now. Your other child, your wife—"

I uttered an involuntary cry.

"I hurt you, I know. But it's best to look things in the face. Judging from the past, he will aim his next blow at your remaining child, and that soon. Now the question is, what measures can be taken to thwart him?"

He continued, not giving me time to frame a reply.

"No eyes are so sharp as those of a parent. If you will allow me to advise you—"

I assented gratefully.

"It is that during the next few weeks, or until the mystery is solved, you and Mrs. Baylor keep constant watch over little Maggie. One or the other of you keep an eye on her every movement. At night let her sleep in the same bed with you. It might be a good plan to attach her hand by a string to your own, so that at the slightest motion from her you will awake. This may seem impertinent in me, but—"

I assured him of my gratitude. Indeed I was grateful, and persuaded of the wisdom of his advice. I determined to profit by it.

During the following week our vigilance never relaxed. Never, I believe, was a child more constantly watched over than was Maggie. But the result you know.

One afternoon, exactly a week after the disappearance of Eunice, I took Maggie by the hand and went for a walk through the orchard at the rear of the house. I came at length to a rustic seat and sat down. Maggie sat contentedly at my side, munching an apple. I must have dozed off.

Suddenly I raised my head with a jerk. The place beside me was vacant. Maggie was nowhere to be seen. The half-eaten apple lay at my feet. And from somewhere in the distance sounded the terrible East Indian revenge cry.

They tell me that for a week I was mad; that I raved incessantly of my lost children, and that if I had not been restrained I would, at times, have torn my best friends to pieces in the suspicion that they were the abductors.

They tell me that the only person beside my wife whom I was willing to have about me was Mr. Holcomb, and that he was with me constantly. Of all this I remember nothing. I only know that I awoke one day with the realization that there was a familiar something missing from the room. I lay for what seemed an eternity trying to recall what it was. And then the truth burst upon me. My wife was gone.

I cried out loudly for her. "Ethyl, Ethyl!"

There came no reply.

Then my reason returned and I turned to the watchers at my bedside. Mr. Par-

ker and Mr. Holcomb, and asked in a calm voice where she was.

"She is well, in the next room," said Mr. Parker. "You have been very ill. Go to sleep."

"I am not ill now. You are deceiving me. What has happened?"

"Nothing, nothing. What are you doing?" For I was getting out of bed unsteadily.

"I am well now, Mr. Parker. And I know what has happened. My three children were taken. And now it's my wife. You may as well tell me. I can stand it. And I'll find out, anyway."

I had bathed my hands and face hastily and was drawing on my clothing.

Mr. Parker hesitated a moment, and then said quietly, but with a break in his voice:

"You are right."

"When was it?"

"This morning, early. Mrs. Parker was here, and they slept together. At four o'clock my wife was not able to sleep longer, and she came out here where I was. At six she went back to the room. The bed was empty. Mrs. Baylor was not to be found."

"Then, my turn is next," said I. "And God grant that it come soon!"

I do not believe it was an hour after Ethyl's disappearance had been discovered before every person within ten miles had been notified and were out in parties or singly, searching for her. The telephone was used wherever possible; in some cases mounted men carried the news, in others it was shouted from house to house.

It did not seem possible that any living creature could have escaped the rigid inspection that followed. The fields and woods were searched, the ponds and streams were dragged.

A party of representative men on horseback went from house to house, and regardless of wealth or position of the owner, searched every room. But nothing was discovered. My wife, like my children, seemed to have disappeared into space.

To me, this was all mere wasted effort. A curious Eastern fatalism had taken possession of me. Nothing could stop the march of events.

It had been ordained that these should

go and that I should follow. I was more than ready. In dull misery I awaited the event.

III.

A WEEK passed by—two weeks. Nothing happened. During that time I suffered a thousand deaths. One afternoon I happened to be up at Mr. Parker's, and, staying late, was invited to remain for supper. Chatting for a time afterward, it was nearly dark when I went out the front gate.

Now, when I left the house I intended to go home, but when I entered the road it seemed the most natural thing in the world that I should turn away from home instead of toward it. I didn't reason out the matter at all, but quietly, and in a more peaceful state of mind than I had known in a month, I took my way westward.

Presently I turned in at a lane, and, after a quarter of an hour, a large house loomed up before. I climbed the steps, and the door opened before I could knock. Old Mr. Holcomb stood before me, a neighborly smile upon his aged face.

"Welcome, Mr. Baylor. I am glad you came. I was just thinking about you. Come in."

I entered without speaking, almost without thinking. Holcomb turned and led the way, and I followed unquestioningly.

We went through several doors and passages, always keeping on the same floor. At last he stopped in front of a door and beckoned me forward. As I passed in front of him, he turned the knob and flung the door open.

For one instant I stared at the spectacle inside, and then sprang forward. At the same instant the magic web that had held captive my wits broke, and, wild with the joy of recovery, I was striving to embrace my wife and my three children all at once.

In my delight at finding them, I did not notice at first that they were all bound. But so they were, each by the left hand, with stout chains, to staples in the floor.

At this discovery I turned, and there stood in the door, not old Mr. Holcomb, but my enemy, the renegade, the dastard,

Simon Applegate, with a great false beard lying at his feet.

I made one step toward him, and then stopped at what seemed an awful phenomenon.

For the floor of the room was sinking, and as I watched I saw that the roof sank also. It stopped as suddenly as it had begun, and when it did Simon Applegate stood in the doorway, fully two feet above the level of the floor.

"'To take them one by one,' he repeated slowly. 'To be near and talk with you and watch your agony. And then you, too.' Ah, I see you remember. Well, have I kept my word?"

"You—"

"Take care. With one touch of my finger upon this button I can plunge you to death. Oh, I've fixed things nicely for you! I have the long arm now. But wait—I'll be more merciful than you were. I'll give you an alternative. I'll kill you now or give you five minutes more to live. Which shall it be?"

The thought of my loved ones made me a coward. Something might happen. "Five minutes," I pleaded.

"Very well." He looked at his watch with devilish coolness. Then, as though his wrath overcame him, he suddenly dropped his assumed manner and snarled, beast-like, "So it is you, is it—you whose words condemned me to ten years' living death? Don't you wish you could have looked forward and foreseen this day? *As I did!* Ah, did I not see it? You and yours in my power! And you begging me for five more minutes of life! Had I not seen it, could I have lived through all these years, do you think?"

"I had not lived in the East for nothing. Couldn't I, lying in my cell, follow you around the earth? Couldn't I trace you here? Couldn't I see you woo and marry the girl whom you were at the same time sentencing to death? Didn't I rejoice as you reared your family, that my prophecy might be fulfilled?"

"Very well. I built this house, making it ready for your coming. Say, when harmless old Holcomb came pottering around, didn't you feel the tendrils of your mind being woven into his, that you might learn to do his bidding?"

"Well, here you are! This room has a double roof. The lower half of it will, in a minute, form the floor. You will have sunk into a cellar, of which no one knows except myself. There, while those fools were searching up-stairs, your wife and children lay gagged and bound. There, in five minutes, you will all lay gagged and bound in death. Oh, it is fixed for you, curse you! Carbonic acid gas. Do you understand?"

I understood. Few men have suffered as I did then. And I was helpless. It was of no use to shout. The house was too isolated; it would only precipitate death.

The children were sobbing. My wife, brave woman, was quiet. I felt that her eyes were upon me. As though fainting with terror, I staggered backward. Simon Applegate's hand moved toward the button.

"One minute!" I pleaded. My right hand made an almost imperceptible movement toward my hip-pocket.

"You beg! You coward! If you only knew how I have waited for this. Mercy! Do you not wish you had shown me mercy? Mercy! Death is my mercy!"

My heart leaped. I felt something withdrawn slowly, very slowly and carefully from my hip-pocket. I had fallen back so as to shield my wife from the renegade's view.

"Spare us!" I cried. "For the love of Heaven! Or at least spare all but me. Take my life, but spare them. They have done you no harm. What comfort will it give you, an old man, to know that you have killed a woman and three harmless babes?"

"Comfort! If you only knew what happiness I feel! Revenge is sweeter for the keeping of it. Did I not say so? It is true—true!"

Crack! A pistol-shot sounded from behind me. At the report I sprang forward.

But there was no need. My wife's aim was true. The bullet entered the fiend's head between the eyes. Death was instant, but even as he fell he pawed frantically at the wall for the fatal button. But he was already falling, and his reach was short. His dead face, staring up at us, was the face of the devil incarnate.

THE MARRIAGE.

BY SOPHIE KERR UNDERWOOD.

A SHORT STORY.



If only it had not rained, if the streets had not been so muddy, if the Sunday editor of the *Times-World* had not been so curt about her story, if she had not torn the braid of her only decent tailored suit as she came in! And, besides, Anne had reached the place where the enthusiasm of free-lance work had worn off, and the uncertainty of next month's board bill was getting on her nerves. Moreover, there had been a woman in the car with just the sort of pointed fox furs that Anne would have chosen if she could have afforded them.

The first flight of the boarding-house stairs was carpeted with good Brussels, the second flight with Brussels that had served a term on the first flight, and the third flight with shabby ingrain. Anne thanked Heaven that the architect had added no more stories to the house, as she reached the last landing and flung out her hand to her door. The flare of gas that brought out the high lights of the golden-oak folding-bed and the marble-topped bureau, of the Civil War period, was not cheering, but she was used to it, and too tired to think of it.

She unlocked her little desk, pulled out an alcohol-stove and a bottle of milk, and set some of the milk to heat. This done, she took off her hat and looked closely in the mirror to see if a gray hair or wrinkle had come since morning. A shabby, clever-looking gray-eyed girl stared back at her and assured her that any thought of wrinkles and gray hairs might be put off till to-morrow.

Then she recollected her letters. The milk was bubbling and trying to climb the sides of the saucepan, so she dumped a couple of rubber bands out of a blue

Japanese cup on the bureau, gave the cup a wipe with the towel, poured out the milk, and sat down to drink it and read the letters at the same time.

The first was a note about some work, a tentative order from a little magazine whose editor she knew would haggle over every paragraph. The second was a letter from a distant cousin, who closed with, "How I envy you your career!" Anne grinned at the word. The third was an announcement that Mme. Violette would sell her entire stock of imported hats at less than cost. Anne grinned at that, too.

"I wonder how she got my name?" she said, and picked up the fourth letter. This was from Fred Johnson, and she knew that he was again asking her to marry him. A part of it she read twice, carefully.

You won't let me come to see you, but at least I can write to you. . . . I want you . . . I want you to rest against my strength, to find happiness in my tenderness. I want to take care of you, Anne. You're too fine and too feminine to be working the way you do now. You know I don't make very much, but there's enough for both of us and a little home. And I love you so . . .

The rain rattled drearily against the window. A rank smell of cooking vegetables floated in over the transom. Anne put the letter down and began to comb her hair. The dinner-bell would ring in a few minutes; it did while she was washing her hands, and she heard the other boarders hurrying down. Presently she followed.

The dining-room was like other boarding-house dining-rooms, the walls covered with dark two-toned paper that would not show dirt. "Scott and His Friends at Abbotsford," on one wall,

stared at "The Trial of Effie Deans," on the other. A gilt-framed mirror hung over the mantel, and a particularly ugly sideboard was filled with little dishes of dessert. Everything was clean, but darkly clean. The china was white and cheap, the glasses thick, the salt-cellars a livid, bargain-sale blue. Worcestershire sauce and catsup wore their original bottles, unashamed.

Anne looked at it all, and thought of a table set for two, of thin glass, of rosebud-china, and flowers, and shaded candles. The air was heavy with the vegetables of yesterday and to-day. At Anne's table sat a speechless school-teacher with red hair, a boulder of a German who ate offensively, an engaged couple who shared a jar of raspberry jam, and an old lady who felt that the servants showed partiality to the others in the cuts of meat.

It was not a bad dinner, but uninteresting—soup, roast beef, browned potatoes, spinach, lettuce salad, tapioca pudding, and coffee. As a climax, Anne found a hair in the pudding. Therefore, in a furious revolt against the day, her work, and the details of her life, she retired precipitately to her room, wrote a letter to Fred Johnson saying that she would marry him whenever he liked, had a good cry, and went to bed, feeling that she had solved the problem of her universe.

At first it seemed like a good dream, this sudden deliverance from the bondage of earning an uncertain and uninteresting living. Anne bought a few of the most feminine frocks she could find—ruffles, and laces, and soft light colors, the sort of thing she had not had since her father died. She hemmed some towels, very badly, and in a month she went around the corner with Fred Johnson and two or three of their friends and was married in the parsonage of the church which she had sometimes attended.

As it happened, there was a new minister, whose first wedding this was, and he and his young wife were so excited about it that their enthusiasm gave the flavor of romance which had been lacking. Mrs. Minister kissed Anne and almost wept over her, and said she was glad it was Anne whom her husband had

married first, and that she hoped they would be as happy as they had been, and a lot of other things with the pronouns all mixed up, but indicative of goodwill.

And Anne gave Mrs. Minister half of her bunch of white roses, and then she and Fred went away to take the train to Atlantic City for a week. Fred had two weeks' vacation from the bank, and the second week they meant to buy furniture and get their flat in order.

Anne was glad when the second week began. She reveled in the choosing of the furniture and china. She developed a mania for bargains, and was in the seventh heaven when she found a dining-room set in plain dark oak that left enough for her to buy the brass-handled mahogany desk she longed for. Two or three relatives on each side gave wedding-presents of money, and this was what they used for the furniture. Anne noticed that Fred's taste ran to things she thought tawdry—machine carving and crude colors—but soon forgot it in the keenness of her pleasure in this grown-up doll's-house. She made curtains and hung pictures with a happiness so poignant that she was amazed.

"You talk about my career," she said in a letter to the distant cousin who had written her in the boarding-house—"well, I've just found it, and it's like every other woman's—at home with the feather duster. Send me your recipe for omelet soufflé, for I'm compiling a cook-book."

II.

A CHARMING little home, sunny windows, open fires, blooming flowers, is a tempting mental vision. In the concrete, one learns that windows are not attractively sunny unless they are washed frequently, that open fires demand constant care, that flowers will not bloom on account of the gas or the steam-heat. The dainty table set for two that is to be such a contrast to the commonplace boarding-house necessitates a deal of work from the hands of some one. Good food does not leap from the market to the table by any conjurer's trick. Shaded lamps have a background of a smelly oil-can. Scouring-soap and scrubbing-brushes are as potent a part of the home-

maker's paraphernalia as the copper jugs and the Mona Lisa.

These were some of the things Anne had to learn.

Fred Johnson had been quite accurate when he said their home must be small. He did not make much money, and it seemed unlikely that he would soon make more. They could not afford a maid, but a woman came in twice a month to do heavy scrubbing.

When the last curtain was up and the last piece of furniture put in its best position—something not lightly decided on, be sure—Anne settled down to housekeeping with that feeling which is common to many brides, a sort of "This is a unique and wholly individual experience I am having, and there never was a housewife who did the things I shall do, or was as successful as I shall be."

And then, very gradually, she began to realize that her house and its keeping was not the most important thing in her life—in fact, that she had married a man as well as a house.

Fred Johnson was assistant teller in a small bank. He was passably good-looking, of the same type as the hundreds of clean-shaven, broad-shouldered young clerks and accountants who throng lower Broadway at the lunch-hour. He had known Anne all her life, and was as much in love with her as he could be; and when he said he wanted to make her stop working—at her business, that is—and make a home for her, he was following the primitive male instinct. He did not see that he was asking Anne merely to change her work; that she would now be cook, chambermaid, waitress, seamstress, and general manager of the limited finances of his home.

He was a great deal more comfortable by this new arrangement, and as he suffered no longer from undarned hose and buttonless shirts he felt that married life was a success. He would look at Anne across the dinner-table and exclaim, especially when her cooking had been more than usually successful, "I tell you, Anne, this is *living*!" But this was where his consciousness stopped. He merely enjoyed the better care and attention and food, and responded to it by

taking on a layer of fat and being fussy about his meals.

They had a few friends, people they had known in boarding-houses mostly, whom they gathered in to an occasional game of cards or Sunday night tea. Otherwise they were pretty well isolated, and Anne found that sometimes days went by when she spoke to no one except Fred and the iceman or grocer's clerk. She was not lonely, however, for her housework absorbed her, and there was a public library where she read a good bit and got books to read in the evenings. She began to study French again, and, after the first effort to overcome the natural mental inertia of disuse, she enjoyed it.

She tried to read to Fred things she thought he might like, but he wanted nothing deeper than the sporting page, and when he had read that he spread it over his face and slept noisily. They went to the theater occasionally, and sometimes, at first, to church; but Fred preferred to lie in bed late on Sunday, and after a time Anne went alone.

It was not many months before Anne found that she needed some new clothes. Also, the linen-closet, which had not been very well nor fully stocked, began to need replenishment. The china and glass and the kitchen-ware had suffered some slight accidents, and new things were needed there, also.

At their late Sunday breakfast Anne laid these matters before Fred as he chuckled over the colored supplements. He looked up when he began to gather the import of her words, and the smile faded away.

"Good Lord, Anne," he said, "needing things already? Can't you buy them out of the housekeeping allowance?"

Anne flushed. It is not easy for a woman who has been independent to ask her husband for money that she may be decently clothed and their home not be shabby.

"I'm afraid not, Fred," she answered. "You know we figured the housekeeping money down pretty close, and it's right hard to keep within it, now that everything's so high."

"Well, I don't know what you're going to do about it," answered Fred. "I suppose you don't want me to give

up having lunch, do you?" Whereupon he returned to the colored supplement, dismissing the subject.

For a minute Anne looked at him through tears she could not keep back. Then she pulled herself together and began to clear the table. In that minute, however, she knew, once and for all, the man she had married, and it was not agreeable knowledge.

The next morning, when Fred went to work, he paused before the good-by kiss, and said casually:

"You said you needed some money yesterday, didn't you?"

"Yes," answered Anne, "I did, but— if it's out of—"

"Well, here's five dollars," he said, cutting her short. "You'll have to make that do." He threw down the money and was gone.

Anne looked about the flat. It was getting into that first shabbiness when a little outlay in the way of new covers and a day or two of the furniture-renovator would make all the difference in the world.

"It would cost twenty dollars to get the things done that really need doing," she calculated. "And I have no spring dress or hat, and my shoes are just worn out. And there's the table-linen—ten dollars would do for that, I suppose, though it wouldn't get very much, and I must get kitchen things."

She glanced at the five-dollar bill. "I'll get the kitchen things with that," she decided.

On her way to the shopping district she passed a magazine office which had formerly given her a good bit of work.

"If Mr. Norris is still editor," thought Anne suddenly. "I know he'd give me a story to do, and maybe I could make enough to get the other things."

Full of the resolution, she went in at once, and Mr. Norris met her joyfully.

"I was thinking about you only yesterday," he declared. "I've got just the sort of story you'd like to do—just your style. Can you do it?"

Could Anne do it! She could have fallen on his fat neck and cried for joy when he outlined it to her, for it was one of those tedious library-research stories which she had always exulted in, and which most of her craft impatiently

scorned. She went away relieved in spirit. The way out of her present need was found, at least.

III.

BUT then she thought of Fred. He had spoken so bitterly at first of her work, and of how he would hate to see his wife doing anything for her living while he had his job. And then she remembered how he had answered her about the money only the day before, and she decided to go ahead and say nothing to him.

"For," reasoned she, "after I've got the things I need, I don't really care very much what he says." Whereupon she posted to the nearest library and set to work.

It took three days to do the story, three days of solid toil—she could not do anything in the evenings—but when it was done she read it over satisfied. Her months of regular reading had improved her style and bettered her thought. She took it to Mr. Norris with an assurance she had never felt in the old days. The next day she had a note from him. He liked it—said it was fine, just what he wanted. He would send her a check at once, and in the meantime she must come in to see him again. There would be other work.

The check was for thirty-five dollars, a little more than she had expected, and Anne spent it with a mixture of joy and fear. Fred had never alluded to her request for money since that Monday morning, and she supposed he had forgotten it. She bought linen for the table, shoes and a hat for herself, and material for two or three blouses. The windows full of smart spring suits made her dissatisfied with her heavy winter serge, which was getting worn. Now, perhaps—another story.

But she must tell Fred. Every time he looked at her new table-cloths she quaked for fear lest he ask whence they came, and she felt unwilling to undergo this constant humiliation of her self-respect. Sometimes she wondered if she was really afraid of his condemnation, or of something else.

Before she went to see Mr. Norris again she told Fred about the story and the check and her purchases. He was

pleased, and somehow she knew that she had known all the time he would be.

"Why, that's fine, Anne!" he declared. "Why didn't you think of it before? If I were you, I'd go see every editor in town. You'll soon have enough to do instead of moping here at home all day."

"I'm glad you don't mind," said Anne, after a pause. "I was afraid you wouldn't like it."

"Mind!" he exclaimed. "Now, what in the world made you think I'd mind? Good Lord, if you wanted to, you could get a regular job, and we could live a lot better than we do!" And he sank again into the evening paper.

Anne looked at him silently. There was nothing to say. If he wanted her to work to clothe herself and help keep up the house, and if she could get the work to do, why, she might as well do it. She kept thinking dully to herself: "I want you to rest against my strength, to find happiness in my tenderness. I want to take care of you, Anne. . . ." And this was what he really meant.

The next day she tried to think it out. This was marriage. She was to work as before and live with this man an absolutely material existence. Marriage! She almost laughed. Why, he was just a comfortable animal, getting through life as easily as he could, with no thought for anything more exacting than his appetite! Anne wondered if he had been so all the time, or if she was responsible for his deterioration.

"For all my life!" she thought. "And this is the sort of thing—or worse—that so many women live with. He isn't cruel to me in any way I could name. He isn't unfaithful to me—probably never will be. He isn't a bad man—he's just a common one. And he's not really—manly. Now, what am I going to do? Suppose I should have a child, and it should be like him?"

She thought of *Nora*, who had revolted against living "with a stranger." Then she thought of *Amelia Sedley* and her passionate devotion to the memory of *George Osborne*, who had been so entirely unworthy. Neither of them seemed to fit her case. Fred Johnson was no *Helmar*, and there was nothing of the dashing scamp, *Osborne*, about him.

"Oh, well," she said aloud, "what's the use of thinking about silly people in books? It all comes to one thing—am I going to live with him or not?"

She walked about the little flat she had kept so carefully, and touched one or two pieces of the furniture she had been most fond of. Then she went into the bedroom and got out her hat and coat. She packed her trunk with her clothes and books, and put some shirt-waists and things for immediate use into a suit-case. When she was ready, she had the janitor call an expressman. Then she sat down to wait for Fred.

"What've you got your hat on for?" he demanded when he came in.

"Fred," she began, "I'm going to leave you. I'm going away to-day—and I'm not coming back."

He stared.

"Are you crazy?" he said. "Or is this some sort of a silly joke? When'll dinner be ready?"

"It isn't a joke, and I'm not crazy," she returned. "I simply mean that if I've got to earn my own living I prefer to live by myself. I've left everything here, and I've paid the laundryman. And I'm going now. Goodby."

Before he could answer her she had shut the outer door and was gone. She heard him call after her sharply, but she kept on down-stairs.

"He thinks I'll be back in an hour or so," she thought as she stepped out into the twilight.

The warm spring air smelled good to her. She took a car, and in half an hour was back at the place where she had boarded before she was married.

"Why, sure," the landlady said. "You can have your old room, too. It's just vacant since yesterday."

Once more Anne toiled up the good Brussels, the worn Brussels, and the ingrain flights. The golden-oak folding-bed and the Civil War bureau had not changed by so much as a scratch. Even the blue Japanese cup was on the dresser.

Anne locked the door and sat down.

"I had to," she said. "Suppose I had had a child. It wasn't marriage. I suppose this is going to be hard—but the other was worse."

And then she began to unpack her suit-case.

LOVE AMONG THE CLIMBERS.

BY BARRY LITTLETON.

A SERIAL STORY.

CHAPTER X (*continued*).

NEW GUISE OF AN OLD FRIEND.



HADLEY had quite frankly been holding him up ever since that night when he had made his declaration upon the yacht. He had perfectly deliberately blackmailed him with the threat of exposing Stephan's imposture himself and reaping the advantage of it; and Tommy, perceiving how completely he was in the elder man's power, had acquiesced in all his demands.

Well, that old threat was outlawed now. Hadley's power over him was at an end.

But this was not the thought that came to Tommy when, upon turning away from Marian's radiant face, he encountered Hadley's cold, contemptuous stare. Hadley had been watching; had, undoubtedly, seen the girl's friendly, impulsive greeting, and had been amused by it.

In that instant a new and disquieting suspicion entered Tommy Glenn's not very active mind. What reason had he to believe that this beautiful girl, who stood here before him so frank, so sweet, so friendly, had made him the topic of ridicule? What reason? None in the world but Richard Hadley's uncorroborated word. And he knew now—had long known—that Hadley was a liar. What if the fellow had lied in this instance as well as in the other?

The thing that one moment had been a dim suspicion, became in the next undoubted—a certainty. He saw the whole plot now at a single glance.

Hadley knew that Marian had refused Tommy; and she had also refused Hadley. Hadley had determined to be revenged upon her for his discomfiture; and in Tommy Glenn he had found a tool which, in the fires of falsehood and hatred, he could forge to his purpose.

Hadley then had repeated a description he pretended Marian had given him of Tommy's proposal. It had sounded convincing at the time—sounded as if it could have come from no one but the girl herself. But what had he said, after all? What particulars had he given? None beyond those which his own imagination and his knowledge of Tommy could supply.

The whole thing went through Glenn's mind like a blinding, searing flash of lightning. It was all so quick that when it had passed he knew, with what was already a certainty, how both he and the girl had been betrayed.

There had hardly been a long enough pause since her last words to him to bring surprise to her face. She was still looking at him, the lovely, friendly smile about her lips, waiting for him to respond to her declaration of friendship.

He could say nothing. He was absolutely speechless. He could only look at her rather wildly for a moment, and turn away.

In that momentary return of his gaze to Marian's face, Richard Hadley disappeared. The moment Tommy left the girl he turned back to find Hadley again, but the older man had lost himself in the crowd. Glenn searched for him vainly for some little time, and finally came upon him just as he was leaving the house. The young man turned back

* This story began in *THE CAVALIER* for January, 1909.

with a rush, got his hat and stick, and started out in pursuit.

Luckily for him, Hadley was walking. Tommy emerged from the doorway just in time to see his enemy, a hundred yards or more ahead, turn into the park, gave a little gasp of relief at the sight, and clutched his stick tighter.

He would not wait—they could have it out now. He moderated his pace a little. Hadley was strolling slowly, and Tommy did not wish to overtake him too soon.

He knew to a certainty the path which the man would follow, and he knew just the spot in that path where he wanted to overtake him.

Hadley for once had fallen victim to his own self-confidence. He might have seen, had he not been blinded by success, that a new element hitherto not reckoned with had come into the situation. He might have seen something that boded ill to himself in Tommy Glenn's face.

But he did not see. He left the house as serene, as coolly contemptuous of all the world as he had always been. He had no idea that Tommy had followed him until, just as he reached an unfrequented part of the path, he felt a touch on his elbow and, turning, saw the face of the man he had duped.

One glance then was enough to convince him that the younger man was dangerous. He had seen that look in Glenn's face before. But the danger then had never threatened him. Now he saw that it did, and he was conscious of a premonitory sinking at the heart.

"I didn't know you meant to leave so soon. If I had, I'd have waited for you. You look as if you'd been hurrying."

"I want to ask you just one question," said Tommy. "Where was I when I asked Marian Farwell to marry me?"

For just the bare first instant there was nothing in Hadley's face but surprise. His brows knitted, and he shot an inquiring glance at Tommy.

"What do you mean?" he asked. But before Glenn could repeat the question, it was clear that he knew. The color began ebbing slowly out of his face, leaving it a dead blue-white, and the sweat started out on his forehead.

"Where was I?" Tommy repeated. "Where were we? What were we doing? You say she told you all about it. Tell me that."

It was a full half-minute before Hadley said anything at all.

"My memory of it is rather vague," he began at last. "I think I told you before all that she told me."

The lurid heat of his anger was making Tommy's mind acute. He laid a trap.

"She didn't happen to tell you then what play it was we were seeing?"

"No," said Hadley, "she didn't, or if she did, I've forgotten. All I remember is her describing the way you looked leaning against the rail of the box."

"You liar!" thundered Tommy. "I've got you now!—no—stand where you are—we aren't likely to be interrupted here—and listen to me a moment. Stand still, I say— Oh, you would, eh? Not much—"

The last exclamation was caused by Hadley raising his walking-stick as if for a blow. Tommy had snatched it from the other's hand, and tossed it away into the shrubbery before the words were out of his mouth. He did it with his left hand, too; he held his own stick in his right.

"Now, stand still and listen," he said. "I suppose you think I've been paying blackmail to you all these months since that cursed yachting trip last summer, and haven't been doing anything else on the side. Well, that's a mistake. Have you noticed that a good many of your creditors haven't sent you any duns lately? Did you ever wonder why that was? Well, I can tell you. Because I own every debt you've made. My lawyer has bought them. I've got every note you've signed, and all I have to do to clean you out is to walk to a telephone-booth. I'd have done all that anyway, after the way you've treated me since last summer—since you welched on that game we started on together.

"And now that I know you've lied about Marian—have made me do her an injury that she'll never recover from, you'll get what I'm going to give you now. When I've finished with you—and that won't be till I've done a good job—no—stand still—then I'll go

back to her and do whatever she wants me to. I'll tell her the truth about you, and about that fiddling vagabond, as well as myself. If she wants me to go and kill him or you, I'll do it. If she wants me to shoot myself, I'll do it. But before I go back to her I'll do just this much toward squaring matters with you—"

Before he had finished speaking, his light, flexible rattan walking-stick had given an evil sort of wink, and had left its mark in a red welt across Hadley's face.

Hadley sprang forward; but Glenn stepped aside at the same instant, still keeping within striking distance, and repeated the blow.

"I'm going to finish you first," he said between his teeth.

CHAPTER XI.

A SINGLE HOUR.

THE moment the door closed she came up to him, and laid her hands on his shoulders.

"Stephan," she asked, "are you happy, quite, perfectly, altogether happy?"

"I don't know," said he, "whether there is such a thing as perfect happiness, or not. But I am about as happy as I can bear to be, Marian."

Her body relaxed a little, secure in the circle of his arms, and her head rested on his shoulder.

"I have sometimes thought," she said after a little hesitation—"I have thought a good many times, in fact, that I saw in your eyes a trouble which you weren't sharing with me. It's been there ever since that night of Uncle Obie's clambake when you asked me to marry you. I have wondered if what I said that night left a hurt that didn't heal. Are you sure you are happy—sure you are satisfied?"

"Satisfied?" he said. "I shall never be satisfied as long as I live with you—No, listen. Because, dear, you will always make me think each day that to-morrow will have something new for me; will show me some new and precious treasure about you which to-day I haven't discovered. Always, as long as I live, I think, you will be as much a

promise to me as you are a fulfilment. Be sure of it!"

There was a little silence between them. She stayed, contented as she was, one arm loosely clasping his neck, and the other hand playing idly with his wavy black hair.

It was their first moment alone to-day—the first time they had ever shut the door upon the whole world.

It was to be a moment of short duration. Before either of them spoke again, there came a tap on the door.

"Marian," said her mother's voice, "I'd like to speak to you a moment."

Marian went to the door and opened it, but did not invite her mother to enter.

"It's Mr. Glenn," the elder woman said somewhat breathlessly. "He came back here and asked for you. They told him he could not see you, but he quite insisted on it. Then he asked for me. He says it's important, and that he must speak to you alone."

The girl turned toward her husband with a puzzled frown.

"That's queer," she said. "I don't want to see him in the least; and I can't think what he could possibly have to say to me. But, then, I suppose he wouldn't have come back and asked for me this way unless it's something important. I'd better go, hadn't I, Stephan?"

She did not look into his face until she had finished asking the question. Then she uttered a surprised little cry of alarm, and rushed across the room to him.

"What is it?" she asked. "Are you ill?"

Stephan had turned as pale as death. "Nothing is the matter," he said. "I am not ill." But, for all that, he reeled a little where he stood, and clutched the back of the chair that was before him.

She had stopped half-way across the room, and stood looking at him, a new alarm dawning in her face. She waited for him to speak again.

"Marian," he said at last, "I want you to let me see Glenn alone, instead of going to him yourself."

"Why?" she asked.

"I want," he said, "to save you from what I am afraid may prove a disagreeable experience."

"A disagreeable experience won't hurt me," she retorted. "Tommy Glenn has been very kind to me. If I can do anything for him now I want to do it, or else to tell him in person that I can't."

"Very well," he said, "then we will go together."

The look of wondering apprehension that touched her face suddenly deepened. She stiffened a little.

"Stephan!" she cried, her voice pleading now. "Stephan—there's nothing—there can be nothing to make you afraid to let me talk alone with Tommy Glenn."

Stephan made no immediate answer. He straightened a little, and his eyes met hers fearlessly enough, with nothing furtive, nothing ashamed, peering out of them. But he was still chalk-pale, and she could see that his hands were trembling.

She waited a moment for his answer. When none came—"I'm afraid I must go, Stephan," she said a little unsteadily.

But still she waited a moment after that, hoping, as if against hope, that some answer would come.

Then she shivered, pressed her lips tightly together, turned away from him, and walked out of the room.

"Where is he, mother?" she asked. Stephan did not hear her reply, for the girl had closed the door behind her.

The sweet, silvery little chime of the clock upon the mantel-shelf had struck the quarter, half, and the hour, before that door opened again.

Not a long time, as time is measured in the ordinary affairs of life. But as to a prisoner waiting to hear the tramp of the death-watch in the corridor—as to those who sit at a bedside watching a helpless agony that can have but one end—so to the man who waited there in the closed room that period of a little less than an hour seemed an eternity.

Even at that he did not know the full extent of his peril. He thought he knew Tommy Glenn. Really he knew but half of him—the weak, vicious, revengeful half. That Tommy could have repented the wrong he had done—that he could have confessed his own share in the imposture, and voluntarily involved himself in the consequence of it, was a possibility which never occurred to him.

That Tommy had come to denounce him as an impostor Stephan felt perfectly sure. He would no doubt bring up facts enough to give his denunciation plausibility, and to shake any faith that was not truly established upon bed-rock. Was Marian's faith so established? Would he see it shining bravely out of her eyes when she came back to him; or would he find suspicion and distrust already planted there?

Could he have guessed that Tommy, in an agony of self-reproach, was trying to take the whole blame of the imposture upon his own shoulders with a sincerity which would have compelled belief from the stoutest heart in the world, he would not have waited in that room for Marian to come back to him. He would have sought her out, would have confided the whole truth to both of them. But no inspired guess at such a possibility came to him.

He waited; and when the door opened he stood looking into the face of the woman framed in its portal. He waited for her to speak; but her face alone confirmed his fears. It was aged, sunken with agony.

He cried out her name, and started toward her; but she waved him back, entered the room, and again closed behind her the door that shut out the world.

It was only an hour since she had closed it so before. How long an eternity that hour had seemed for her! But her manner held a strange and almost ghastly composure.

"I came back," she said in a quiet, even voice, "to give you a chance to speak, if there is anything—anything at all you can say. It was not easy to do. I thought for a moment, after he had gone away, that I couldn't come back: that I never could bear to look in your face again. But I have come. I ask only this: If there is nothing you can say—and I don't see how there can be anything—that you won't try; that you will just stand there silently, and let me go away. But if you wish to speak I will hear you."

"So it needed only that," he said. "Only the unsupported word of such a man as he to destroy everything, the whole fabric of your love and faith.

An hour with him, and I stand before you, condemned already, with nothing more than a condemned criminal's right to be heard before sentence shall be passed upon him. Well, I have this to say, just this: that never since the first moment we met have I lied to you. If I have kept back from you a part of the truth it was in a hope—"

She did not allow him to finish.

"I hoped I might have been spared that pitiful quibble," she said. "You mean you have never told me in so many words that you were a count, and not an impostor in masquerade. I suppose you never did. But will you pretend that you told the truth when you—when you—made love to me? No, don't answer that. That would be a lie that I shouldn't care to hear repeated."

"I have not lied," he answered steadily. "Not when I told you that I loved you, nor at any other time."

"Then is what Mr. Glenn told me a lie? A lie from the first word to the last?" The very sound of her question seemed for an instant to awaken a little gleam of hope in her eyes. "If you can answer that question in the one word, 'Yes,' then I will listen," she added. "Otherwise, there is nothing—there *can* be nothing that would be worth the pain of hearing."

"I don't know yet what he has told you."

"He said that he found you playing the violin in a restaurant; that he hired you to impersonate a count, on the understanding that you were to make love to me, and marry me if you could. And he told you that his purpose was to revenge himself for a slight that he thought I had put upon him. That is what he told me. Was it a lie from beginning to end?"

"No, it is partly true. But it is only a small part of the truth. Will you hear the rest?"

She did not answer; and her silence allowed him to go on:

"I came to this country about a year ago," he said. "I came because I believed it was a place where a man might call himself the captain of his own soul; that what he was—he, the real man—was all that counted—"

"Oh — *please* —" she interrupted.

"Please spare me that. If you only knew how bitter to me is—"

"The very day I reached New York," he went on steadily, "I saw your face—saw it, and—loved it. Somehow it seemed to hold for me the possibilities of all my dreams. I meant to work to earn my living. But that was not all. I meant to win a place in the world—to fight my way up to a place in your world."

"Meantime, I saw you when I could. The day to me seemed dead that didn't give me some little momentary glimpse of you. The best happiness that I had was in sending you flowers without letting you know or dream from whom they came, and, once or twice, in seeing you wear them. It was all a dream—a foolish dream, perhaps—but I was happy in it. Then came the day of my awakening. That was the day you drove in the park with Richard Hadley—the day your horses bolted. I was the man who saved your life."

He could not see her face: she had turned away from him. But at his last words he saw her start as if to face him, only to arrest the action half-way.

"I stood before you then," he went on, "but you didn't look into my face. You saw how I was clad, and that was enough. You offered to pay me, and I went away. And then that night at the restaurant Glenn made me his offer. I declined it, and told him that he was a blackguard. I thought my dream was over—the whole of my dream. But I met an old man who gave it back to me. And then that morning came a chance—what seemed a chance—to make my dream come true. So I reconsidered Glenn's offer, and wrote him a note and told him I would do as he wished."

"In a sense I have carried out the bargain: at any rate, he thought it was his bargain that I was carrying out; but if he has got back to his rooms by this time he will find all the money he has ever paid me waiting for him—all of it, but the very first, in the original checks which he gave me. So it wasn't his bargain that I was carrying out."

"You told him you would do as he wished," she said quickly. "You did it. There can't be anything to say after that. Really there has been nothing to

say at all. I think I am rather sorry that I came back and listened. I have been thinking while you talked of what I am to do with the wreck you have made of my life. I am going away to-night, just as I had planned to go with you. I shall take mother with me.

"I shall tell her that you and I have quarreled. I think it would kill her if I told her the truth. And you—if you have one grain of pity left for me—if your malice is satisfied—you will go away, too, quietly; without letting any one know the truth of what has happened between us. And if you are in need of money I'll supply it. That, I think, is all—is quite the last word that need ever pass between us."

She moved toward the door; but he intercepted her.

"There is this last word more," he said, "you shall hear: I love you with all my soul, and I have not lied to you!"

"Will you open the door, please?" she asked.

CHAPTER XII.

WHAT MATTERS MOST.

PEOPLE often remarked, during the winter that followed Marian Farwell's marriage, that Obadiah Williams was beginning to show his age. His appearance at his office had ceased to be an event by which men could set their watches.

It was no longer possible for the reporter who wanted a good local story to get it by the simple expedient of waylaying the old gentleman when, at exactly twelve o'clock, he made his daily appearance at the corner fruit-stand to buy the three apples which constituted his lunch. In former days he had always been good for from half to three-quarters of a column. It had just been a question of tapping him; the supply was inexhaustible.

But this winter there had been whole weeks when his favorite haunts knew him not. Even at his desk he had seemed listless, indifferent, absent-minded. Financial New York would have got the impression that he was becoming a negligible quantity, had it not been for a short, sharp panic in the

stock-market which, for a week or two, galvanized him into his old activity.

While it lasted—while his office was being haunted by cotton-kings, railway-kings, gas-kings, all begging for money, of which commodity Uncle Obie invariably had more than anybody else—while that state of things endured he had been his old self again. But when the market had regained its tone, and things had settled back into their old rut, the former state of languid indifference seemed to envelop him again.

In May he shook the dust of New York from his feet, and disappeared within the sacred fastnesses of his estate upon the sound. Here he was absolutely inaccessible. The moon itself could have afforded him no securer retreat from the aggression of prying reporters.

But if such a reporter could have seen him about a month later, as he sat out on his veranda puffing placidly at his old cob pipe, and eying every ripple that went racing across the sheltered little cove which gave harborage to his yacht, that reporter would have got a surprise.

It was the old Uncle Obie who sat there—the man of a year ago—square, sturdy, bright-eyed, although the wrinkles about the eyes and mouth were perhaps bitten in a little deeper. There was an air about him to-night, repressed, but still patent to an acute observer, of expectancy. To-night, surely to-night, something was going to happen.

The sound of a light step in the doorway made him turn his head; and the next moment Marian appeared.

To the eye of one who had not seen her—to the eye, that is, of any of her New York friends—she would have appeared strangely altered. Yet it would have been a little difficult for those friends to tell wherein the alteration existed. She was not much thinner; she was not especially pale. Certainly she was not less beautiful. Her body, as she moved, lacked, it may be, something of the old resiliency that had characterized it in former days. That was the only material difference; but that was not the important one.

The great difference cannot perhaps be better expressed than by saying that it seemed as if somehow another soul

looked out of her eyes. It was an older soul—a sadder one.

As he looked at her now, Uncle Obie was reminded of a phrase Stephan had used about her at a time when the old man had not known that it was Marian of whom he spoke: "When she has been hurt," he had said, "when the acid of life has eaten through the veneer that is over her soul, then some man will stand before her, and she will see him as he is." Was it an omen, the old man wondered that that phrase had occurred to him just to-night.

She had been his guest now for nearly a fortnight—she and her mother—ever since their return from Europe. They had gone abroad in accordance with Marian's swiftly formed plan, which she had announced to Stephan on the night of their tragedy. They had traveled about most of the time, but had succeeded in avoiding the main channels through which the great annual stream of Americans is guided about Europe. They had lived quietly; had had the good fortune to encounter almost no one who knew them, and had searched for something of sufficiently poignant present interest to serve as an anodyne to the bitter pain of the past.

The search had not been successful; although Mrs. Farwell had often been deluded into thinking that it was, for Marian did not mope—made no parade of her grief, and courageously aided her mother in thinking up and putting into execution plans for various things that promised a good time.

But along in April—they were in Paris then, and the endless avenue of horse-chestnut trees in the Luxembourg Gardens were coming into their annual period of flowering glory—suddenly one day Marian said:

"Mother, I want to go home—not to New York, but up to Uncle Obie's place in the country. I don't know whether I can stand it there or not; the place will hurt horribly. But at least I will be able to breathe there; and I can't do that here. Through the days and the nights here I feel as if something were pressing—pressing down on my breast—pressing the very life out of me. Will you come home with me, mother?"

The year had witnessed an important

change in Mrs. Farwell. Her daughter's tragedy—the bitterness and humiliation of which had been revealed to her gradually during the year—had eaten through the veneer that covered her own soul. It was not completely gone, perhaps, but at least the genuine maternal love and sympathy had got a little breathing room for themselves.

She had assented to Marian's suggestion instantly, and had cabled to Uncle Obie that they were coming. It was at his suggestion that they had taken a boat little frequented by people of fashion. The boat had landed at Boston instead of New York, and Marian had been conveyed to the country of her desire without the pain of encountering the familiar sights and familiar faces which could hardly have been avoided in New York.

During the two weeks he had had her here, Uncle Obie had been treating her in a manner in which the wisdom of the serpent was mingled with the gentleness of the dove. He had not been over-attentive—had shown no unwillingness to let her be out of his sight, no labored and ostentatious solicitude. But she had never for one moment been out of his waking thoughts; hardly out of his dreams.

She came toward him when she saw him sitting in his big, wide-armed easy chair, and, dropping down on a tabouret which stood beside him, rested both elbows on his knee, and supported her chin in her hands.

She looked out across the harbor. Twilight was beginning to fall; they had finished their frugal country supper long ago. There was a young moon high in the sky which would in an hour or so begin to lose its pallor, and illuminate the scene in which it now played so inconspicuous a part with a witchery and magic of its own. But, for the present, the glory of pearl and amethyst and opal from the lingering afterglow of a half-veiled sunset was enjoying its hour—glowing and reflecting from the surface of the harbor, and drenching the low-lying shores with a deeper and tenderer light.

The girl's eyes filled as she looked, and she pressed the palms of her hands against them for a moment, as if to shut

out the intolerable beauty and pathos of the sight.

But she looked up again directly, and her voice when she spoke sounded natural enough:

"What's that little house across the harbor, Uncle Obie?" she asked. "It must be new. I am sure it wasn't there last year. I've noticed it several times, and meant to ask you about it. Why," she added the next moment before he could answer, "there must be some one living in it. There's smoke coming out of the chimney. I didn't know there was any one in the world you'd share your solitude with."

"Oh, he doesn't take any solitude away from me that I can't well spare," said the old man. "He's a sort of friend of mine that I've known for a good while. I found him rather run down with ~~over~~work this spring, and with a good deal still to do this summer, so I persuaded him to come up here. He's a kind of hermit-crab like myself. We don't bother each other any. The place is plenty big enough for both of us."

He rose rather abruptly at that. One might almost have suspected that he wished to forestall further questions on the subject of the newcomer who lived across the cove.

"Come," he said, "let's go out for a row. There couldn't be a finer time for it. Your mother's busy with her novel, and she won't mind if we run off."

The girl hesitated; but finally, with an obvious effort, said: "Yes, I'd like to, very much."

Marian's decision was really significant, for, since her arrival, until to-night she had never gone out on the water after sunset. The old man understood the feeling well enough, and did not press her. He knew the associations that little harbor must have for her. He knew enough of the story to understand how the force of those associations must be multiplied when twilight and a boat were added to them.

He took her acceptance of his suggestion to-night in a thoroughly matter-of-fact way. Leading her down to the broad, dumpy little boat wherein he was wont to sit and fish the somewhat unprofitable waters of the harbor for so

many hours each day, he cast off the painter, shipped his oars, and with a brisk, businesslike stroke began pulling her out into the middle of the harbor.

He talked almost as steadily as he rowed, telling her one story after another, mostly old ones which she had heard before, and laughing at the points of them himself to obviate the necessity of her doing so. At first she tried to keep up the pretense of attending him, but after a while quite frankly she abandoned it.

He would have stopped talking had he not been afraid that his doing so would break the tense abstraction of her mood, and bring her back into the present with a jar.

When at last he saw her lean forward a little, and draw in a quick breath as if she were about to speak, he stopped rowing instantly, and leaned forward on his oars.

"Well, my dear?" he asked.

"Uncle Obie,"—she hesitated, and pressed her hand against her lips as if that could stop their trembling—"Uncle Obie, do you know where he is?"

If the words brought a throb of wild joy and hope to the old man his face did not betray him.

It was just the same strong, keen, kindly face, with eyes whose glance seemed somehow to offer strength and support—the same face she always saw when she looked toward him.

"Do you mean Stephan Aranyi?" he asked a little breathlessly.

"Yes."

"I think I can find him for you, my dear, if you want him."

She swayed a little, and with both hands gripped the thwart on which she sat to steady herself.

"Somehow to-night," she said, "I feel as if the—the ice was breaking up; as if I could talk again—cry, and somehow come out of this horrible paralyzing numbness. You won't mind if I cry, Uncle Obie? Until to-night, when I looked out across the harbor there, I hadn't had the blessing of tears since—" She did not complete the sentence; but there was no need.

"Talk to me," he said. "That's all I've kept alive for; just to be ready to help you when the time should come."

There was a long silence after that, while he watched her steadily. She seemed calm enough after her first outburst—seemed to be trying to get her thoughts in order.

At last she looked up at him, and, in a low but steady voice, began to speak:

"The day it happened—the day my world fell down—I was dazed—I couldn't grasp fine distinctions. I only knew that a terrible blow had fallen on me. I knew that the man I had given my heart to had been hired—hired to get it. The man who had hired him told me. He was down on his knees clasping my skirt and sobbing like a child. He told me he would kill the man who had married me, or himself, or the man who had tempted and instigated him to do the vile thing he had done. And I had to believe what he said. No one could have lied like that.

"And the other man—Stephan—he couldn't, or wouldn't, deny it. All he would say was that he had not lied to me. I hardly knew what he meant by saying that, although he said and repeated it so that they were the last words I ever heard him speak—that he loved me; that he had not lied to me.

"I couldn't believe that then. I couldn't believe anything, but the one ghastly fact that had been forced on me. But, Uncle Obie, this is what I wanted to say: I can't believe the other thing now—I mean, that he was lying all the while. I can't believe that he was lying at all.

"Through this year—nights and days—the old scenes with him, and the old hours I had with him have kept coming back and repeating themselves.

"Every inflection of his voice, every movement of his hands are burned into my memory so that I can never forget them. I've gone over and over them, every one; and when I see him there as he was, when I hear his voice again, I can't believe he was lying to me. And yet, if Mr. Glenn told me the truth—and Stephan himself admitted that it was partly true—" she stopped abruptly.

"I don't know," said the old man thoughtfully. "It seems to me there might be a way out. Glenn may have

thought he was telling the truth, and yet may not have known what the truth really was—that is, there may have been some essential fact about it that he didn't know."

"But if there was that," she cried, "why didn't Stephan tell me?"

"Perhaps," said the old man, "you didn't give him a chance."

She shivered a little, and buried her face in her hands.

"Oh," she whispered, "if I could only believe that!"

The old man took up his oars again as if about to resume his rowing; but as he leaned forward for his stroke he paused and asked a question in utter seriousness.

"Marian, what is the very kernel of the truth you want to know? What is the thing after all that matters most? If you knew he really loved you—if you knew that it was his true self that he showed you, and his true heart that he gave you, would the rest of it matter so very much?"

She slipped to her knees in the bottom of the boat, leaned forward, and clasped him tight around the shoulders.

"Do you know anything about him?" she asked. "Have you heard from him—talked with him? Do you think that could possibly be true? Oh, there's nothing that could matter if I knew that!"

He did not answer in words, but he kissed her forehead and stroked her hair. Through the very contact of his hands hope seemed to be filling her again. Calm came over her spirit.

Presently she resumed her seat.

"Will you do something for me, Uncle Obie?" she asked. "Will you row me over to the beach yonder where we had our clambake that night? Will you put me ashore there, and leave me alone for a while? I think if you would perhaps I could get my world back again."

The old man leaned rather suddenly for his next stroke at the oar, and he bent his head as he did so. There was nothing sad about his smile now, if Marian could have seen it. It was half-humorous; and one might almost have fancied there was a touch of mischief in it.

"Yes," he said. "I'd do more than that for you, my dear."

And he gave way briskly at the oars.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ENCHANTER'S CLOAK.

THE old man sent the boat up the beach, stern first, and Marian stepped ashore. The twilight had already faded, and the half-moon high up the sky was silvering the sands.

"You won't be afraid to be left here alone?" questioned Uncle Obie. "I sha'n't be far off; and there's no one else around—to hurt you."

"I'll call when I want you to come back," she said. "No, I sha'n't be afraid."

She turned and watched him row away. When the boat had disappeared around a jutting point of rock, she stretched her arms wide as if to embrace the whole of the night, and drew a long, deep breath. There was healing in it somehow—this return to the old scenes she had thought she never could bear to visit again. Neither could she feel exactly as if she were revisiting it after a year's absence. It seemed more as if the year had been a long nightmare from which she was now just beginning to wake—as though the real world had meanwhile been standing still.

She strolled up and down the beach a little, as she and Stephan had strolled together after they had left the camp-fire that night; and finally, her heart beating with a strange expectancy she could not understand, she approached the log where they had sat—the spot where he had declared his love for her, and had asked her to become his wife.

The log was in the shadow of a little clump of straggling bushes, and she could not see it clearly. At a distance of twenty paces from it she halted suddenly and clasped both hands to her heart. A sudden dryness in her throat was all that prevented her from crying out. For she thought she saw the very man with whom, in her imagination, she had been walking on the beach. He appeared to be sitting on the log where they had sat together, and to be looking thoughtfully out across the harbor.

For a moment she swayed where she stood. Then, with a little voiceless gasp, she drew a step nearer.

In the breathless silence of the night the sound of that sharply indrawn breath carried across the distance that lay between them. The man turned toward her and sprang to his feet. Then, rather slowly, he came toward her, while she gazed at him, wide-eyed.

Was he real, or was she dreaming? Or, again, was she indeed, as she had fancied a few moments before—waking out of a dream—a terrible dream—and coming back to reality again?

When he was only a pace away from her he stopped and dropped on his knees. He did not look up into her face. The first words he spoke were the last words she had ever heard him speak—the words he had uttered when he had opened the door and let her go out from his life, as they both had thought, forever:

"I love you with all my soul, and I have not lied to you."

"Stephan—" she whispered. "Are you real?"

And, as if seeking the answer to her question, she caught the hands that groped toward hers.

He rose then, and for the first time their eyes met.

"Can I make you believe it now?" he asked. "Will you give me a chance to try?"

"I believe it already," she said. "That is why I came back. My soul has been telling me the truth all this year, though my mind wouldn't believe it. It told me—told me every day and every night, until I thought the insistence of it would drive me mad—that you must have been true; that you could not have been false, whatever strange, fantastic pattern of circumstance might have been woven around you."

"Then you will listen to the rest of the story now?" he asked.

"Not yet," she said quickly. "Already I know all that matters. I know you really loved me all the while. I know it was your true heart you showed me. For a little while that's all I want to know."

Something like a sob broke from his lips at that. He did not speak, but he

bent over and kissed both her hands—the palms of them. Then she slipped her arm through his and led him back to the log where he had been sitting—where they had once sat together.

“Do you think,” she asked, “that we can turn back time? Can we pretend that it is that other night—a year ago? Stephan, dear, can you ask me the question now that you asked me then, about the enchanted cloak?”

“Would the answer be different to-night, Marian?” he asked.

“Yes,” she said; “I don’t care about the cloak any more. Whether it was real or enchanted, doesn’t change the man who wears it, because he’s the man I love, Stephan.”

It was a good while after that when he rose, walked away from her a little, and then, coming back, halted before her.

“I’d like to tell you the story, though,” he said. “It doesn’t seem very important now, but I’d rather you weren’t in the dark about it any longer. Will you listen?”

“I’d rather hear you—” she began, but then interrupted herself with a little laugh. “Perhaps we might stop and be sensible for a few minutes,” she said. “Is it a very long story about who you really are, and how you came to accept Tommy Glenn’s bargain, and all the rest of it? As you say, I can’t make it seem very important to-night. But, yes; tell me. There, now I’m ready.”

What “there” meant is a matter which doesn’t concern this story.

“Why, you know the most of it already,” he said. “All you lack is the key that unlocks the puzzle. You know that I declined the proposal Tommy Glenn made me that night in the restaurant, and I told him he was a black-guard for making it. That was the end of a pretty serious day for me. It was the day you were run away with in the park.”

“Yes,” she said sadly; “I know.”

“Well,” he continued, “I went home that night thoroughly discouraged—thoroughly heartsick. I thought—God forgive me—that you weren’t worth dreaming about; that you never had been worth dreaming about; that there was no soul in you at all. But the next morning in the park, very early, I met

Uncle Obie. We had never seen each other before, but there was something in his face that made me pour out my story. I didn’t tell him who my dream-lady was, of course, and he didn’t guess it. But he showed me my folly—showed me that you really were worth dreaming about. He made me a little happier; but, after all, not so very much, because it seemed so utterly hopeless that I could ever make the dream come true.

“But when I went back to my room I found a letter which altered the whole shape of the world for me. I found that I was actually, at that moment, the very man that Tommy Glenn had asked me to pretend that I was—Count Aranyi—the head of my family. It was something I had never dreamed would happen. The former count was a young man of my own age—my first cousin. There was every reason to expect that he would marry and be succeeded by his heirs. He and I had been enemies ever since we were grown. I hated all the things he cared about, and he despised everything that I thought worth while.

“I had hated the life in which my position had placed me, and finally decided to come to America and make my own way. I believed I could—I believed I was man enough for that. But my cousin was killed by a fall in the hunting-field, and I was left the head of the family, with the titles and the wealth which went with them. But, of course, the process of investing me with all that would be a slow one. The amount of red tape connected with it was enormous. I thought if I went back to Hungary to assume my position as a preliminary to coming back and finding you, the chances were that I should be too late. I had no money, no friends here, and I feared that Tommy Glenn might find some one else to carry out his intention if I refused. So I accepted his offer. Till I could get some money of my own, I took his.

“That night when we came out here together I wanted to tell you everything. But, Marian, dear, you can’t imagine how I craved the belief that you would have loved me, anyway; that you would have taken the man I was before I received that letter—would have given your heart to him, just exactly as you

had given it to the man to whom that accident made such an enormous difference.

"I tried to pretend to myself that night that the letter hadn't come; or, having come, that there had been some mistake about it—that all my little tinsel glory was going to blow away and leave me in my rags. And I wanted to believe that you would love me just the same if that happened.

"I know how brave you were to tell me the truth, and I said to myself that any one courageous enough to do that had a true heart, after all. But, with or without that final assurance, I couldn't let you go. Do you remember that I told you I loved you better than my soul? That was the way I felt about it that night. And then that other day—that dreadful day—when Tommy Glenn came to tell you his story, I did not dream that he meant anything further than to denounce me as an impostor.

"That he should do so at all, took me by surprise, because Hadley knew that I was real. He had found it out weeks before we were married, and I had his promise that he would tell Glenn on our wedding-day. So when you came back to me I had no idea of the scene you had been through. I thought you were permitting the mere word of a malicious enemy to wreck the whole fabric of your faith in me. Can you forgive me the ghastly months since then, Marian—the

(The End.)

torture of them? For I know how much they must have tortured you—I have only to look at the torture of my own soul to know that."

"Forgive you?" she said; "forgive the refiner's fire that has burned away some of my dross? You don't need an answer to that, Stephan."

It was some time later that she rose reluctantly from her seat beside him. She laid her hands upon his bare head. "Are you real, after all?" she said. "I wonder. It's quite like the ending of a dream. I don't know how you happened to be here. What wonderful, strange fate brought you here to-night, of all nights?"

"Not so strange," he said; "I've been here every night since you came back. From my little cottage across the cove I've been watching—waiting for the time to come—for the time that came to-night."

"Then Uncle Obie knew all along?" she asked—"knew all about you?"

"Yes. And he has always said that you would come back to me. There have been times when his faith was all that kept me going."

Her eyes filled with sudden tears.

"Dear old Uncle Obie," she said, and her voice choked over the quaint name. "I suppose we'd better call to him. He must be awfully tired rowing around."

"Give me five minutes more," he pleaded.

"I'll give you all my life," she said.

THE FIRE GLOBE.

BY NORMAN H. CROWELL.

A SHORT STORY.



It is not from lack of authenticity or absence of the evidence necessary to a conclusive case that the narrative appending is now here given to the world. The tardiness of its appearance is due solely to the unprecedented reluctance of the

man within whose ken the strange scenes were enacted to relate his story.

As the world knows—or, rather, that part of the world which sits at the Golden Gate and looks out across the broad Pacific—I am but a plain physician, skilled solely in ministering to the physical needs of my hapless brethren. To

me life is by far too serious a matter to admit of indulgence in wild or chimerical ideas. Therefore I ask the reader to hesitate long before placing at my threshold the charge of levity or a wilful desire to misrepresent. Far be it from Max Brabazon to say aught that savors of that senseless rot termed fiction. I pen the true tale of a man whose name has never yet suffered stain or reproach—a man who told his story at the expense of wealth, hope, and the companionship of his fellow men.

My practise, which is of confining magnitude for a man of my years, is of varied character. Years ago the volume of my clientèle made it imperative that I should yield to popular pressure and engage assistants. Latterly I have reduced myself to the exclusive treatment of intricate affections of the brain and nerves.

There entered my office one day a man, preceded by the boy, who held out a card. I glanced at the name on the fine bit of board and admired the exquisite engraving. I was about to scan some smaller characters in the lower left-hand corner, when an exclamation of surprise or pain escaped my visitor, and I glanced quickly toward him. To my intense astonishment, the man was bowing and smiling calmly, for all the world as though he had not, a moment before, startled me to such an extent that his card slipped from my fingers.

I spoke hastily, as is my nature, and perhaps a trifle brusquely:

"My good sir, may I trouble you for an immediate history of your case?"

My visitor coughed slightly, covering his mouth with his gloved hand, and sat down easily in a chair, which he drew by jerky little hitches close to my desk. I did not enjoy the man's manner, particularly as he kept focusing a most peculiar, beseeching smile upon me. I was puzzled, but made shift to preserve a calm exterior, awaiting his reply.

"We are, I presume, absolutely alone?" he asked at length.

I glanced significantly about the room, and he smiled.

"Then look at me! Do I appear otherwise than perfectly sane?"

"My dear sir," I answered, meeting his gaze apprehensively, "I might prove

either side of such a hypothesis. My judgment must be reserved for incontestable proof. I should be unwilling to—"

"Good! Good! Your temper is under perfect control. I will present my case."

He fumbled in his inner pockets, a troubled look on his face. A knock sounded at the door. It was the boy, announcing the arrival of my most wealthy and most interesting patient. I waved him to wait, and still the stranger fumbled.

"Hurry, hurry, my dear Riggs!" I urged. I recollected the name on his card.

"I—I've mislaid something. But answer me this—how long can the average human being keep an important secret?"

"H'm! The period ranges from a very few minutes in woman to—to—"

"Yes?" he questioned eagerly.

"Well, forty years for a man," I ended.

"And the result of repressing a secret that strived for air?"

"Insanity, sooner or later."

As he seemed incredulous, I snatched up a copy of "Kiepler on Conscience," and flipped the pages to paragraph thirty-five.

The harboring of knowledge of crime closely resembles fear in its effect upon the human mind. While fear paralyzes, secrets emaciate and disintegrate the faculties to a marked degree. Such knowledge may lie dormant for long periods of time, only to burst out with redoubled fire, dwarfing the mind, depressing the soul, and betraying the unhappy victim's longing to confide the fatal truth in his haggard face, pleading eye, and shuffling step. The end is invariably insanity.

"Thank you, sir. And the fee?" he asked in a voice of relief.

"Fee?" I gasped.

"Yes, for the information."

I stared hard at the man. Could this paltry confidence be the momentous thing he wished to hide from the casual ear of eavesdroppers?

"There is no fee, Mr. Riggs," I remarked quietly.

"Very well—though I am well able to pay for it. When shall I return?"

"For what?" I was puzzled at his manner.

"Further information, sir."

"At two to-morrow," I said mechanically.

"I will be here. Good day, sir." And my visitor was gone.

For a time I sat staring hard at the desk, forgetful of the impatient client awaiting me. Then I roused, tapped the bell, and the boy entered, preceding Mr. Morgan Heffelworth. I must confess that I was short with Heffelworth on this occasion, and I recall observing keen displeasure on his handsome countenance as he quitted the office. However, he was gone, and I was free to ponder on my mysterious visitor.

As I studied the floor my eye lit on the card I had dropped. I hastily picked it up. I reproduce it here:

JASPER RIGGS, SURVIVOR.

SHUCHUCHIN—1860.

I puzzled long over the card, but could make nothing of it, and, having tucked it carefully away in my case, I settled myself to the tasks in hand with energy, that I might be wholly prepared for my strange visitor's return.

II.

THREE minutes later, by my clock, than the appointed time, he came. As he entered he glanced swiftly at the clock, whose ticking seemed to fill the room with its jar. Then, striding across the apartment, he opened its face and turned the minute-hand back to a vertical position.

"It's fast by the observatory, sir," he said easily.

"How do you know that?" I asked in surprise.

My visitor glanced at me keenly. He appeared frightened—as if I had caught him off his guard. His manner of gazing at me grew irritating, and I felt a resentment at the awkwardness of the situation. At length I repeated my question with all the firmness at my command.

"Listen!" said he eagerly, as he advanced a step toward me. "You have heard of ———, the greatest astron-

omer in the United States—the man whose calculations are unimpeachable, whose suggestions are laws, and whose advice is never questioned or disputed? Do you know of him?"

"I have his books in my library yonder, and I have the further knowledge that he is a single man, a confirmed recluse, and that but few men can honestly say they have ever seen him," I replied.

"You can say it—I am the man!"

"Indeed!" I ejaculated, with weakness.

"I am about to unfold to you a matter that is unbelievable—to the ordinary man. Being an astronomer, the truth of it is apparent to me, and would be so even if I had not personally experienced the happenings I mean to relate. As a preliminary proof of my story, I show you this!"

As he spoke, my visitor, whom I now knew as the foremost astronomer in the Western Hemisphere, drew from a pocket a round object wrapped in tissue-paper. Snatching the flimsy covering away, he placed the thing on my desk and removed his hand.

Ye gods! It blinded me. As I looked at it, the impression of sunlight on water flashed to my mind—then of polished steel struck by glancing light—then of countless stars flashing up into my poor weak eyes.

"What is it?" I ventured.

"The Ball of Fire. Simply a diamond, absolutely flawless, cut and polished to six hundred geometrically perfect facets and a perfect sphere."

"And it is worth—"

"Priceless. To me it is an item of proof. There is no other diamond—compared to that—and never will be. May we have wine, sir?"

The boy was alacrity itself in reply to the bell, and presently stood at my side with tray and glasses. With his innate suavity of manner, he picked off a goblet and set it before me.

My visitor raised a warning hand.

"Let me lift my glass, lad. Ah, a rich color, Brabazon—here's your very best health!"

He gulped down the liquid, and then, to my utter amazement, hurled the glass into the fireplace, where it burst into a

hundred pieces. So astonished was I that I placed my glass down untasted. The boy, half frightened at the sight, hastily deserted the room.

For a moment our eyes met. Then my visitor spoke:

"When I have told my story, you will understand. Sit down."

We drew up chairs, and he launched into the tale, speaking clearly and rapidly, as if sure of his facts and eager to get on with them.

"At the age of twenty-one I was placed in charge of a crew of six young fellows like myself, equipped for a journey through interior China. The construction company in whose employ we were gave us general instructions as to route and duties, relying upon me for all matters of lesser importance.

"We landed at Hong-Kong, and there I superintended the furnishing of our launch. Six months later our little party of five men—one having died of fever, and one having disappeared inside an opium-shop, never to return—found itself at the gates of the great plateau. After housing our launch securely we abandoned it and proceeded on foot. Our luggage consisted only of firearms, eatables, and my three-inch telescope, for even at that age I was fond of the heavens.

"Sixteen days we traversed the gloomy depths of a valley, and on the seventeenth scaled its rocky sides and looked about us. Far to the north we beheld a structure that appeared to be a portion of a stupendous wall. Hastily unslinging my glass, I directed the powerful lens upon the spot. I uttered an exclamation of surprise as there drifted before my gaze a vision of turrets and battlements, over and beyond which I saw spires, towers, and domes—the insignia of a great city.

"Each man took the glass in turn, and each verified what I had seen. We bent our steps toward the city, and at noon of the second day we topped a swelling ridge and found ourselves within a stone's throw of the wall. We stood in awestruck silence as we realized its magnitude. For a mile on either side of the corner abutting toward us we beheld a bare, blank wall, and at that distance foliage cut off the view.

"With the indefinable feeling of

explorers in a dangerous land, we approached the wall and stood at its base. One of my men, noticing the peculiar crisscross style of the corner masonry, begged permission to attempt an ascent. I was willing, and the brave fellow, casting off his shoes, began to scramble up. We watched him until he disappeared from sight above the edge of the towering wall.

"For five minutes we stood huddled at the foot of the wall, our ears alert for the faintest whisper from our comrade. Suddenly the silence was broken by a sound as of the blare of a hundred trumpets, mingled with the ringing of deep-toned bells. This was followed by the shouts of a vast multitude. Our fears were ended by the sudden reappearance of Weeks. He leaned over the wall and beckoned to us.

"Glad to be in action again, we lost no time in clambering up the giddy ascent, and presently all stood on the unguarded wall, gazing with inquiring eyes at a vast concourse of people who rushed hither and thither about a great open court, perhaps a mile distant. We were safely sheltered from view by an inner wall that stood shoulder high.

"Immediately below us, at the foot of the wall, ran a swirling torrent, penned in on either side. It foamed madly as far as we could see along the wall. It became evident that the inhabitants of this city relied implicitly upon the race-horse stream and the towering wall to quell the temerity of any ordinary invader.

"Suddenly Weeks grasped my arm and pointed toward the mob. It was moving our way. I leveled my glass—forgotten till now. I focused a tumbling, angry mob. In the forefront was the figure of a woman. She it was whom they seemed to hold in disfavor. They were leading her by a rope—as a beast. At sight of it my men became furious with rage.

"We watched until the humming throng reached the water's edge below us. Their hideous wailing was hushed as the grand central scene drew near enactment. Directly beneath us they led forward the woman—a white girl of our own race, tender and timid, and tied to a rope like a dog. My blood leaped high as I be-

held the indignity to which she had been subjected, for the fiends had stripped the clothing from her body. She stood, gazing at the brute who gripped the leash square in the eye—fearless, yet resigned to her fate. The archdevil, a squat, evil-browed villain, appeared, borne on a litter. He addressed a bombastic harangue to the mob and ended by motioning with his arm toward the defenseless girl.

"The brute who held the rope approached her and at arm's length cut the cord from her fair neck—the black hound—as if contact with her perfect body would have contaminated him! I barely saved his paltry life, as Weeks was bent on shooting as I glanced round.

"Then, without granting her a moment in which to speak or pray, the black beast seized a sharp stick and drove her to the water's edge.

"I put one knee over the wall to see the better, for my eyes beheld many colors of red. Then, with a leer on his ugly face, he pushed the girl with the stick. She threw up her hands, and I caught one swift glance of her pale face as she turned in falling. At that moment I leaped from the wall.

III.

"I CLOVE the water an instant behind the helpless form of my countrywoman, overtook her far beneath the boiling surface, and caught her in my arms. When we rose to the air we were hundreds of feet away from the cruel faces of the mob, but close by in the water I saw the hideous features of the black brute who had acted as executioner. Weeks had taken signal advantage of my absence.

"I had small opportunity of contemplating the fate of my brave fellows. By superhuman effort I succeeded in guiding my burden close to the inner wall, where I clutched frantically at roots and branches as we swept along. I was well-nigh exhausted in my futile efforts when I at last caught hold of a stout root and clung to it. Hard as it was in my weak condition, I presently had the joy of dragging my unconscious charge safely to land, and, a moment after, hear her ask in good sweet English, 'Where am I?'

"Her plight was truly pitiable—

bruised, weak, and naked save for the scanty shelter of my bedraggled coat. But ere I had time to express a word of sympathy, the bushes parted, and we were instantly surrounded by a squad of evil-faced men. My heart sank within me, and I submitted for the only time in my life to having my hands tied.

"The next thing I recall is being brought face to face with the squatty heathen chief. Weeks and his men were there—Weeks with a smile on his bronzed features as he looked fiery contempt straight at our captors. Long and windy harangues took place, and at length the maiden whose life I had saved was dragged in and cast down before the chief. There she burst into an impassioned speech in the native tongue. Her pleading dealt directly with us and our fate, for ever and anon we could see the wicked eyes of the old villain turn in our direction.

"Presently she ended, and with outstretched hands awaited the mercy she craved. The revolting spectacle of so fair a creature kneeling before the foul brute struck us keenly, and I could feel Weeks strain his mighty muscles in an endeavor to burst his bonds.

"The chief finally spoke—a brief remark, accompanied by a pompous wave of the arm. Instantly the girl sprang up and ran toward us with a glad smile on her face. I would have grasped her hand, but suddenly she halted and drew back.

"'Do we go free?' asked Weeks quickly.

"'Yes, my friends, on a condition. This is the great outlaw city, Shuchuchin. These people are lineal descendants of Shi Kan, a Chinese traitor. They are accursed by their race, despised by each other, and forgotten by their fellow men. I was stolen in Peking three years ago and brought here. Until two days ago I was their queen. Then, while returning from a raid, a horse's foot slipped on the mountainside, and a sacred idol, together with a box of gems, loosed from the pack and plunged into the river. The fate I so narrowly missed was to expiate my crime in causing this loss. The decree is that this man'—indicating Weeks—'shall fight the lion. When that is decided, our freedom de-

pend upon the recovery of the treasure. Will you try it, friends?"

"If we fail, what will happen to you?" asked Weeks.

"Then—there will be no intervention the second time," she remarked significantly.

"Is yonder beast's word dependable?" I suggested.

"It is his sole virtue—you can rely upon it."

"Good! The lion—where is he?" urged Weeks.

"The maiden spoke to the watchful heathen, and he waved his hand toward an inner door.

"I need not describe at length that encounter. It was a beautiful piece of work, and when the brave fellow's mighty arm sent the knife to the hilt in the brute's heart we cheered him lustily. Pausing merely to cast the knife from him, Weeks cried:

"The treasure—where is it?"

"It was a heart-breaking proposition we faced. Down a sheer precipice the loot had plunged into a narrow, foaming river. After a gloomy survey of the scene, Weeks suddenly sprang erect and shouted:

"The diving outfit! We must get it!"

"There was much delay, and Weeks, impatient, picked twenty of their strongest men and departed to the southward. Anxiously we waited until, a long week later, we beheld him leading his men wearily across the plain. With but a night's rest, he had insisted upon making a descent, and when, after only ten minutes' search, he brought up the ungainly figure of the idol, we were elated. Weeks spent another hour ransacking the bottom, but in vain—the box of gems eluded his eager hands. At length, exhausted, we drew him up, and I prepared for a descent.

"As the men screwed on my head-piece I was conscious of a grayish cloud gliding across the face of the sun, and the earth seemed passing into deep shadow.

"Clouding up, boys!" were the words that greeted my ears just before my hearing was cut off by the air-tight dress.

"What I have told you up to this point is mere incident compared to the remarkable thing that next occurred. I was at

work thirty feet below the surface of a river, in muddy water. As far as sensation from the outer world was concerned, I was deaf and sightless.

"My first inkling of wrong was a sudden difficulty I met in breathing. Reaching up, I discovered that my airline was flabby, and I immediately unsnapped my heavy lead sandals and signaled Weeks to pull me up. As I did so my groping fingers grappled a solid body amid the ooze of the bottom, and even as my brain reeled in its effort to account for the dire extremity I realized that I held the precious box of jewels in my hand.

"Meanwhile, freed from the weight that held me down, I shot swiftly to the surface. No man can give an accurate account of things done while under stress of great danger or excitement. How I rid myself of the diving-suit, preserved the box, and finally stood on solid earth a hundred yards below where I had gone down, I cannot tell—I am still alive, and must have accomplished it.

"I stood on the shelving bank of the river, dripping, and gazed about me. The air was hot, stifling, and filled with an irritating dust. I could see but a little way. The unmistakable odor of hot cinders submerged in water swept to my nostrils. The grass beneath my feet was scorched and withered. I clambered up the bank with an inexplicable sense of danger creeping over me. Everywhere was a fine, impalpable powder, white and warm. The air hung heavy with the minute particles of dust as it sifted down.

"Weeks and his men were gone. Nature was silent, save for the lapping of the waves, now gently coming to rest. As I went I cudgeled my brain in an effort to account for the cataclysm, but each conjecture left me more deeply mystified than before. Presently I stumbled over the body of a man—one of my men—dead, his hair burned off, tongue protruding and parched, eyes fixed in the look of horror with which he had met his fate.

"The way was strewn with the hot ashes, and more than once I placed my hand on rocks that burned painfully. At length I neared the city wall. The gates were entombed yards beneath a

mass of fiery débris, and I was forced to scale the jutting corner. One glance inside told me that I had no need to attempt further entrance. Desolation held full sway—all was ruin—charred and smoking. I gazed, and felt an uncontrollable loneliness.

"Clinging to the ivory box, I made my way slowly down the wall and retraced my steps to the river-bank. Then I journeyed southward. Several days' journey brought me to an Arab trader's camp, where I learned enough to convince me that the disaster was due to the meeting of a comet with the earth. The description given by the old Arab was scientifically true and accurate. I think that is all I have to tell."

IV.

My visitor picked up his hat, which had fallen to the floor. Reaching over, he grasped the glittering diamond and toyed with it nervously. I watched him through half-shut eyes mechanically.

"Is this the secret you have kept for forty years?" I asked.

"Yes."

There was silence, broken by the boy, who brought a tray of wine. Glad of the interruption, I seized the bottle and poured a draft. My visitor seized it, quaffed it off, and threw the glass in the fireplace. I glanced up with astonishment.

Noting my look, but disdaining to vouchsafe an explanation, he began rolling up his coat-sleeve with the air of a man absorbed in deep study.

"Take your glass and tell me what you see," he commanded.

I picked up my lens, and would have grasped the arm, but a warning cry restrained me. I scanned the member closely. Near the elbow was a circular patch, red and apparently inflamed. Under the forearm were several patches, all circular and covered with tiny grayish-white scales. I recoiled from the man.

"My dear man," said I at the conclusion of the scrutiny, "since when have you been aware that you are in the clutches of *lepra alpha*—that you are a leper, a menace to your fellow men? It is my duty to warn the proper authority, sir!"

"No! This is my secret—and yours.

There is no danger to the public. I will lock myself up with my books and instruments and never leave them."

I glanced at him skeptically.

"You doubt me. Take your pen and write as I direct."

National Bank—vault three, lock-box fifty-five.

I jotted the data down, and folded the paper carefully.

"Now get a beaker half filled with strong chlorin solution."

The chemist filled the request in a moment's time. My visitor produced a slender key and dropped it into the purifying liquid.

"That key opens the iron box. Inside is the ivory box. Open it by pressure on the tiger's right eye. You will understand."

"And what am I to do?"

"Keep the box, the jewels, and—my secret. My death, which is not far distant, will release you."

I had no answer, but took the key from the chlorin and attached it to my ring. When I turned, my strange visitor had departed.

This was a year ago. Two days ago the most celebrated astronomer in America died, and his name and fame is on every man's lips. For the first time I have visited the vaults of the bank to which he had referred me. I searched out the iron box, opened it, and lifted the ivory casket from its long resting-place.

I thrust my thumb forcibly against the gorgeously inlaid tiger's eye, and the delicately carved lid flew open. Untold wealth of precious stones filled the box—gems that glittered and scintillated like drops of liquid fire. A cranny at one end was just large enough for the Ball of Fire. I dropped the giant diamond into it and closed the case.

Hastily I inserted the ivory case inside its iron covering and locked it. Then, overcome with a sense of dread, I quitted the vaults.

I shall never go back. I have told my secret, and I dismiss the matter. Whether the marvelous tale told to me is true or not, I cannot say. The gems are there—as he said they were—and I have merely repeated the thing as he gave it to me.

GLOVES OF RETRIBUTION.

BY STACY E. BAKER.

A SHORT STORY.



THEY were strangely alike, these two.

The Kid sat silently in his corner, with the Dublin Spider and Timmy the Cat in attendance and giving him final instructions.

"'Es so blimed hold," said the Cat, "that 'e'l die hof hold hage hif you hou-ly let 'im sti' th' limit. Keep awi' from 'im. hold beggar; keep awi' from 'im!'"

But the grim-faced, battle-scarred champion sitting directly opposite looked, despite his close-cropped, iron-gray hair, the very antithesis of old age. His chest and arms were a network of pink muscles.

He was the victor of a hundred clean-fought battles, and his face wore the rather bored, blasé look of the old-timer. This was in startling contrast to the Kid, whose mouth was twitching nervously and whose limbs were an excited tremble.

However, this was characteristic of the Kid just before action. He was no novice—don't believe it! For since Cubby Warren had picked him off the docks five years before, he had fought himself into the stellar position of the man who was forcing the grizzled champion to again don long-neglected mitts.

Only a small minority thought that the grand old man of the ring would meet defeat from this youngster. It was, rather, a genuine longing to again see the old master defending the title that had brought the demand for the mill.

And now thousands surrounded the great roped arena, where the premier lightweight of them all was listed to stifle the ambitions of another aspirant.

The champion had entered the ring first—an act unusual—and directly thereafter the challenging gladiator crawled through the ropes.

The Kid walked quickly over to the great one and extended a hand, which the champion condescendingly shook.

An amazed buzz scattered through the mighty gathering.

"Gad, they might have been cast in the same mold!" This from a tall sport in a ringside seat.

"Must be goin' to keep th' championship in th' family, dad," cried a voice from far in the rear. The good-natured crowd laughed until the big amphitheater shook with the sullen roar of a volcano.

In truth, they were alike. From stern jowl to calculating eye; from muscular chest to lithe limb, the contesting light-weights were duplicates.

"Well, Kid," came from the title-bearer, as their hands unclasped. "If I *must* lose I won't mind losing to a dead ringer for myself as I was when I won the championship."

But the Kid had frozen. He scowled. A vague uneasiness made itself manifest in his actions. His lips trembled as if about to speak, but he turned without a word and walked back to his corner.

As the Spider and Timmy the Cat bandaged his hands, they poured the usual allotment of more or less valuable advice into the unattentive ears of the young fighter. The Kid's mind seemed wrapped up in other things. He sat rigid, staring straight across at the old battler.

"Kid's tryin' tuh hypnotize yuh," laughed Red Kelly, a second in the corner of the gray one. "He's goin' tuh scare yuh, actin' on th' advice of them wise 'uns in his camp."

The veteran laughed.

He now arose and carefully felt out each foot of the padded floor, afterward striding across the canvas to examine the Kid's bandages, in turn extending his

own for a similar scrutiny. He felt the rope carefully. It was these little niceties in detail that had made him—and kept him—a champion.

"The old fox never takes a chance," came from a hoarse admirer who had just placed a thousand at odds of 10 to 6.

"He's hip to all tricks," contributed a cory.

The referee introduced the principals, featuring, of course, the champion.

"Gentlemen, I am pleased to present James Hogan, champion lightweight of the world."

The veteran bowed, and a burst of deafening applause shook the building.

"Mr. Hogan will defend the title this evening in a finish fight, Marquis of Queensberry rules, against Warren's Kid, the most promising boy in the business." The Kid sprang from his corner and came forward, where he gained his share of the demonstrated appreciation.

"Shake hands."

The men touched padded fists and turned to their respective corners.

"*Bing!*"

At the sound of the gong both men swung to the center of the ring, stools were deftly grabbed from the enclosure, and the fight was on.

It was plain to all that the Kid felt no fear of the great master. Some, who had preceded him, had been half licked before they entered the ring. Not so this youngster.

The two fit men danced lightly in front of each other, trained eyes seeking an opening. Arms, under whose clear, almost transparent, skin the velvety muscles quivered and swelled, cautiously guarded their respective fighting machines. The huge assemblage, to a man, was hushed and silent.

Now a sudden exchange of light, harmless blows, and the men came to a clinch. The referee, himself a heavyweight pugilist, broke them by main strength, and walked nonchalantly between them.

He had barely accomplished this before the veteran leaped toward his young opponent, and, in startling contrast to his preliminary work, unleashed a terrific right swing for the jaw.

"*Thud!*"

The Kid, surprised with his guard

down, caught the fair blow, wobbled, and with a groan, fell forward on his face.

11.

"*One.*"

The referee, with the pendulum finger of pugilistic destiny, started slowly counting.

A bloody froth appeared on the lips of the senseless man.

"*Two, three, four.*"

The young battler moved restlessly.

"*Five, six.*"

Dull eyes opened and gazed listlessly at the counting man.

"*Seven, eight.*"

The Kid, catching the count, came back to his senses with a start, and climbed to wobbly knees.

"Little good it'll do him," came audibly from the tall sport in the first row. "The old man's waitin' to finish him off. Just look at him grin."

"Finish him, Jimmy!"

"Keep away from him, Kid! Stall until the round's up!"

"Put him out!"

The crowd yelled excitedly.

"*Nine.*"

The Kid, now poised in the attitude of a runner just about to get away from the wire, sprang to his feet, and before the veteran could finish him, wormed into a clinch.

"Break!"

The referee strove to pull the clinging youth from the champion—then:

"*The gong!*"

The hurt youngster tottered to his corner. The veteran, without a scratch, waved a flirting hand to his howling admirers.

Joy was in the Hogan camp: consternation in the corner of the Kid.

Strenuous methods are required to build a man up from a practical knockout in time for the succeeding round, so snappy action was the order of the moment with the Spider and the Cat. The Kid's brief seconds with his handlers were calculated to stimulate him to speedy form. Now, the prize-fighter's eyes were again alive, and the pallor was gone from his face.

Youth quickly recuperated, and the aspirant to the championship was only nineteen.

A loud laugh come from the corner of the champion, bringing a flush to the face of the Kid. His breath was expelled in a little, hissing gasp from between tightly clenched teeth.

"I'll show 'em!" he growled savagely. Timmy the Cat slapped him approvingly on the back.

"You're game, boy," said Timmy.

"Bing!"

The gong again! The buzz of excited voices died away as the two fighters came to the center of the ring. The Kid seemed thoroughly recuperated.

A light exchange of blows, a terrible clinch, a breakaway; then:

"Gee, the old man 'most had him again!" from a ring-sider.

But the old man didn't.

Ducking the vicious swing, the Kid flashed a punishing left to the solar plexus of his adversary. The old champion, an awful look of pain on his face, tottered. With a perfect frenzy of blows, the Kid was upon him. He beat down the gray one's guard, and with terrible swings and upper-cuts felled him to the floor.

The old champion made no effort to rise.

At the count of ten he still lay where he fell, and his seconds carried him to his corner.

The big amphitheater was now filled with a mob of excited men. There was a rush of friends to the roped arena to congratulate and cheer for the new champion.

"One moment."

The slender embodiment of grace, a Turkish towel flung over his shoulders, the Kid stood in the center of the ring, holding up a hand for attention.

Jamming this way and that on their way to the various exits, the sports stopped. A ripple of applause waved through the crowd.

The battler impatiently silenced them.

"Cut it!" he said crisply. "I jest wanted tuh tell youse guys dat dis bloke I put it onto is me ol' man. You seemed tuh notice dat we looked alike.

"He quit me mudder before I was born, an' I've been in trainin' fer dis bout ever since I wuz big enough tuh put up me mitts.

"I swore I'd get him, an' I have. T'ell with th' championship! I got him!"

The Kid turned abruptly and strode back to his manager, who awaited him in his corner.

A burst of deafening applause shook the rafters of the big building.

The gray old fighter, still unconscious in his corner, groaned uneasily.

A CHANGE OF HEART.

BY CAROLINE LOCKHART.

A SHORT STORY.



HATES kids; I despises kids." said Dad Walker querulously, as he rubbed a clean place on the window-pane and looked at the household goods of Doody, the squawman, going into the log shack across the street. "There's eight of them Doody young uns, if I got the right count on them. They mill round so fast it's like countin' sheep."

"Some folks is all-same pigeons," ob-

served Bacon-Rind Dick, who was mixing baking-powder biscuit in the dish-pan.

"Er Belgian hares, er French Canadians, er field-mice, er—"

"He's come up off the reservation to put his kids in school, I reckon."

"He furnishes the school and we furnish the teacher. Personally myself," declared Dad sourly, "I don't aim to educate eight Doodys after this year. I've paid school taxes and packed school-

marms back and forth from the railroad as long as I'm goin' to."

"Still, them Doodys ought to be company for us this winter, with everybody movin' out of the camp." Bacon-Rind wiped his doughy fingers on the edge of the dish-pan and joined Dad at the window.

"Company! I won't have nothin' to do with 'em. I hates half-breeds worse nor p'izen, and I don't want them kids to git in the habit of runnin' over here. They're liable to pick up something."

"That's so," Bacon-Rind replied dryly. "They might steal the stove, or the bunk, or that thirty-pound bear-trap."

"Makes no diff'rence; and if they start visitin' here, I'll tell 'em where to get off at."

By dwelling upon the Doodys and the manner in which they would overrun him during the winter, Dad worked himself into a temper which gradually simmered down into a sullen resentment against Doody for daring to have so many children. He became a kind of monomaniac upon the subject, and each morning when he looked through the clean place in the window-pane he demanded with the same regularity with which some people comment upon the weather:

"Whatever kin a man think of hisself to marry a blanket squaw?"

To his surprise, he was not molested by the Doodys. Their own affairs appeared to be sufficiently interesting to keep them on their side of the street, and after several weeks had passed his acquaintance with them consisted chiefly of seeing them driven to school each morning in various stages of dishabille.

When the days grew short and the towering mountains surrounding the abandoned copper-camp of Swift Water made them even shorter, the long evenings seemed interminable. Bacon-Rind thought wistfully of the Doody family, whose shrieks of exuberant laughter frequently penetrated the silence which lay between the two partners, long since talked out.

But he dared not suggest a truce to Dad, of whose belligerency he stood somewhat in awe. And so he fretted, and chafed, and braided rawhide ropes and horseshair bridles until he could stand the monotony no longer.

"These snows ought to have brought the sheep down," he said one day, regarding the white mountains speculatively. "I b'leeve I'll get Billy Upton and take a hunt. I hankers for sheep-meat. You won't be lonesome?"

"Lonesome! Me?" Dad snorted. "I was seven months alone onct, whar' the timber was so thick you had to lay on your back to see the sun."

So Bacon-Rind packed his camp outfit on a cayuse and started with Billy Upton for the hills.

Dad picked a little, a few hours each day, in the tunnel which was to cross-cut the copper lead that he hoped to unload on a tenderfoot from St. Paul in the spring; after which labor he returned to his cabin and sat with his feet in the oven, thinking the same thoughts he had thought a million times before.

Bacon-Rind was a pin-head — Dad never had thought of him as anything else; yet he missed his partner uncommonly. He had to admit that.

Late one afternoon he washed a place on the window, lower down, where he could sit and look at the "Injun outfit" across the way. After he had done so he stepped back into the middle of the room to see if the clean spot was sufficiently conspicuous to attract Bacon-Rind's attention. Bacon-Rind was sometimes rather shrewd for a pin-head. He was lonely; he had to admit that, too, and it looked kind of sociable to see the black heads bobbing behind the windows of the log house opposite.

Dad oiled his boots with bear-grease and darned his socks, relined his pack-saddle with sheepskin and mended his corduroy coat; then, when he could think of nothing else to do which would enable him to kill time, he took his ax out to the grindstone, although it was already so sharp he could almost cut hair with it.

"If Bacon-Rind ain't back pretty soon," he said peevishly, "I'll git worse nor the wild man I knowed in Wisconsin, who lived in a holler tree and et a deer at a sittin'."

II.

STILL thinking of the wild man, Dad ground his ax, pouring water upon the stone from the can he held between his teeth.

"Gee, but you're a nawful big man!"

Startled, Dad dropped the can and turned to look at the owner of the shrill but friendly voice.

Recovering from the slight embarrassment caused by the steady gaze of a pair of black eyes, he replied: "And I'm the runt of the family. Father was twenty-two inches between the eyes, and they fed him with a shovel. What might your name be?"

"Maudie Doody. I got a nawful splinter in my foot, an' ma's washin' and won't take it out, so I runned away." Miss Doody stood like a chicken on a cold day, holding up a bare foot which she had thrust into an old moccasin. "I brung a pin for you to get it out with," she added.

"Do you want to p'izen yourself, usin' pins?" demanded Dad sternly.

"Gee, you got awful blue eyes!" observed Miss Doody, quite unmoved.

She followed Dad into the house, and, pulling up a chair, thrust her bare foot into his lap. She was so entranced and fascinated by Dad's unconscious grimaces as he pulled at the splinter with a needle that she forgot the pain of it, and said flatteringly when he had finished:

"You don't hurt half as much as ma. You don't like to hurt me, nuther, do you?"

"I hates cryin' and yellin'."

"You don't like Injuns, nuther, do you?"

"Some Injuns." Dad replied evasively—"good Injuns."

"I'm good. I never talk Injun talk. My brother, he's bad. I got my sleeve tore out fightin' him, 'cause he was bad and talked Injun talk. Can you sing?"

"Like a markin'-bird," Dad said grimly.

"What can you sing?" inquired Miss Doody pointedly.

"Well, I can sing 'Whar' the Silver Colorady Wends Its Way,' an' I can sing 'Bury Me Not on the Lone Prairee,' an' I can sing 'Away to the Baraboo-boo-boo,' an' I can sing—"

"Sing 'Baraboo-boo-boo.'"

Dad hesitated.

"It ain't hardly a song," he admitted.

"It's more like words set to a noise."

"Sing 'Baraboo,'" reiterated Miss Doody.

Dad cleared his throat and pitched his voice in a key which both amazed and delighted his visitor.

"Away to the Baraboo - boo - boo!" sang Dad lustily. "To the Baraboo, away, away! Away to the Baraboo-boo-boo! To the Baraboo, away, away!"

Almost any disinterested listener would have agreed that Dad had described his song rather well. It sounded like a hungry coyote howling in a bunch of willows.

"Sing it again, and trot me," commanded Miss Doody, sliding from her chair to climb into Dad's lap.

Dad tiptoed to the window and looked up and down the road. Bacon-Rind had a way of coming in like a man sneaking up on a bird. Then he returned to his chair, and shortly Maudie Doody's black head lay upon his arm while the heel of his hobnailed boot kept time to the enchanting song.

She came the next day after school hours, and the next day, and the day after that, always bursting into the room in a manner which suggested flight; and each time the same dialogue took place between them.

"Sing 'Baraboo.'"

"Aw—you don't want to hear 'Baraboo.'"

"'Baraboo.' Make a lap. The buttons on your coat hurt my ear. There!"

"Away to the Baraboo-boo-boo!"

"Trot me!"

"To the Baraboo, away, away! Away to the Baraboo-boo-boo!"

It was a ravishing song!

III.

BUT one afternoon she did not come. The snow lay drifted deep in the street, and the wind which howled down the cañon was cold enough to freeze a bear. Dad paced the narrow space restlessly.

"When the snow lays deep like this, and it comes off cold and sets in to blow, I feel like bitin' myself," he muttered irritably.

Then he stood at the window again and viewed the scenery for the thousandth time, though the scenery about Swift Water was not difficult to grasp or to describe.

It went straight up on three sides, and the fourth side opened out on fifty miles

of Indian reservation. Pines and spruces grew slim and tall on the surrounding mountains. Pheasant and grouse roosted in the branches, while the elk and deer and mountain sheep kept the game-trails open. A stream of water roared down from Avalanche Basin and fell into a deep pool just below the pole bridge where the bull-trout lay.

It was lonely! Even as Dad groaned, the door of the squawman's house opened, and Maudie Doody, looking over her shoulder like some wild creature, to see if she was observed, stepped into the street.

Dad's heart leaped joyously, but sank again as she turned and began floundering through the snow toward the pole bridge. Where was she going, that Maudie Doody, without mittens and only a foolish little cape about her shoulders? Dad's eyes narrowed in a strained look of anxiety.

Yes, she was wading through the drifts to the pole bridge!

She always stopped there on her way from school to see if that big black trout was still lying motionless in the pool below.

She reached the bridge and stood on the edge, peering into the water. Her red calico dress snapped in the wind, and when her cape lifted Dad could see that her sleeve was still "tored" from fighting with her brother. Her feet were braced far apart, and when the gusts came she lay back on the wind to keep from being blown forward.

Dad reached for his sheepskin coat.

In the second that he took his eyes from the swaying little figure on the bridge, it disappeared! His inarticulate cry was like a bellow as he tore open the door and covered the intervening drifts in leaps and bounds.

When Doody, the squawman, and Harrison, from the other side, had reached the bridge, the icy waters of the pool al-

ready had closed over Dad's head. The widening circles told where he had sunk, and the tense seconds were minute-long before he rose. His face was livid with the terrible cold—a cold which numbed like a paralytic shock.

"She's ketched to something!" he gasped.

"Come out!" yelled Harrison.

For reply, Dad sank once more; and when he rose again a calico skirt was gripped in his stiffened fingers. With the last desperate stroke of which he was capable, he dragged Maudie Doody to the water's edge. The north wind froze his clothes into an icy sheath as, half unconscious, he staggered with the child in his arms to his own cabin.

"It's no use," said Harrison, and he looked at Maudie Doody lying beneath the torn red quilt on Dad's bunk. "She was under too long."

"She's dead!" The squaw cried a little in the corner of her shawl and went home.

Doody and the seven little Doodys followed her, sniffing.

It was hours later that Bacon-Rind approached the cabin, a hind-quarter of sheep-meat upon his back, a beaming smile of anticipation upon his face. Some sound from within caused him to listen.

"Away to the Baraboo-boo-boo! To the Baraboo—away—away!"

Bacon-Rind grinned and scraped his feet on the step.

"He's got lonesome and despr'it," he thought. "Dad's drunk."

"Hi, old man!" he yelled.

The door flew open; and Dad, with a stick of stovewood in one hand and an expression upon his face not unlike that of a she-bear with cubs, towered above him, shouting threateningly as he pointed to the bunk:

"What you comin' in like a cow-elk for? Can't you see she's asleep?"

KISMET.

WHEN Love stood knocking at my door,

I turned away my eye;

And now my door is open wide,

And Love goes laughing by.

Wm. H. B Cooper.

SILENCED.

BY BANNISTER MERWIN,

Author of "A Knight of To-Day," "The Girl and the Bill," etc.

A COMPLETE NOVEL.

CHAPTER I.

THE VISIT.



DOWN in his basement laboratory, John Archer was bending over a bubbling glass retort. A pearly steam rose slowly to the neck of the vessel, and escaped, through a connecting tube, which opened under the hood of a ventilating chimney. To breathe that steam would be death. Every few seconds Archer cast an anxious eye to make certain that every wisp of it was caught by the draft and carried up to the air above the roofs, there to be made harmless by dispersion.

In the body of the retort the bubbling, milky liquid grew thicker and thicker. At the right instant Archer would cut off the flame; the boiling would cease; and after a few hours a few grams of tiny yellow crystals would remain as the product of his process. Once before he had made the experiment, though on a smaller scale, and even now there lay in a drawer of his desk, in the consultation-room up-stairs, a little vial labeled:

EXINA—DEADLY POISON.

"Exina"—he had called it that because its base was still X, an unknown substance. One of his former medical college friends, Armisted, had sent to him from the tangled forests of the Amazon a packet of the leaves of a plant which was unknown to botanists. The Indians, it seemed, made a singularly fatal decoction from the leaves, and

Armisted, knowing John Archer's interest in any poison that acted directly on the heart, took the trouble to seal up a considerable quantity and send it to the nearest port by the same bearers who went to replenish his own supplies.

Archer prepared to shut off the flame. A ray of sunlight, filtering through the grated window, struck upon the retort, and the thick liquid at the bottom gleamed with baleful opalescence. Archer looked at it intently. The pearly steam, itself so deadly, had become tinged with red. That was the moment at which he stopped the distillation.

What here remained was enough to slay an army. Its swift potency was more terrible than the weapons of war. A needle-point, dipped in a strong solution of the crystals and applied gently to the tongue of a cavy, had resulted in the almost instant death of the little animal. He had himself touched his own arm with a glass rod dipped into a much weaker solution, and his heart-beat had weakened so rapidly that only by using the most powerful stimulants had he brought himself back to normal condition.

He pondered over the notes he would make on the distillation just completed. The pearly steam—he regretted that he had not condensed it and tested it more elaborately than in his first experiment; another time he would study that phase of the process. Also he was ready now to make a solution of Exina so attenuated that it could be given safely, in small doses, to human beings; for he had hopes of it, as a useful agent, to regulate the heart-beat in cases where the heart acted too strongly—an agent much more dependable than any depressant known.

So far as Dr. John Archer was concerned, Exina was to be not a poison but a remedy; not a bane, but a blessing. His young face relaxed as his imagination likened himself to the mysterious alchemists of the Middle Ages, brewing their weird decoctions at the command of princely masters more unscrupulous than themselves. His master was no prince, but the ideal of well humanity. Like the alchemists, he labored secretly, in a laboratory that was almost subterranean, and he worked with a substance as little known to him as the common elements had been unknown to them.

The laboratory had no door. Its two windows were high above the floor-level, and they opened upon the shallow city yard. The room was entered by a circular iron stairway that communicated with the consultation-room above. No one but himself was permitted to use that stairway. He even cleaned the laboratory himself.

On the inner wall of the retort the crystals were already beginning to form. Some hours must pass before the crystallization would be complete, but the process was now on, and all that could be done in the interim was to watch.

A buzzing of the house telephone on its stand near-by arrested Archer's meditations. He took up the receiver, and heard the voice of Tousey, his man.

"Excuse me, Dr. Archer, but there is a lady to see you."

"Ask her to come back during my office-hours." Archer did not relish interruption.

"She says that her call is urgent but not professional. It is Miss Crane—Miss Enid Crane."

Enid! That was another matter.

"Show her into my office, Tousey. Tell her that I will be there in a moment."

He hastened to the porcelain sink, against the farther wall, and washed and dried his hands. Then he removed the white duck surgeon's apron which he always wore during his experiments, and hung it on its hook. His brown eyes had been alight from the first mention of his visitor's name, and there was a new elasticity in his movements.

With a final glance at the cooling retort, he rapidly mounted the spiral stairs.

At the top was a narrow landing. There was no light there, but he did not stop to switch on the electric light, for every inch of that space was familiar to his touch. Finding the spring-catch, he pushed it back. The wall-panel turned on its pivot, and he stepped into his office to meet the startled eyes of Enid Crane.

"Good gracious, John!" she exclaimed, rising from her chair. "Do you always make such a Mephistophelian entrance?"

"Seldom." He smiled. "But I was so eager to see you—"

"That you walked through the wall?"

"It is really a door," he protested. He closed the panel and pointed to the tiny keyhole. "This is not so medieval that one presses a secret spring."

"Yes, I see." She loosened the fur about her neck and laid her muff on the desk beside her. "But why not have a door that looks like a door?"

"Well, I rather fancied it this way. It is more unobtrusive."

"Decidedly. But what do you hide in there? I'm terribly curious."

"Well, I do a great deal of experimenting, Enid, and—"

"On your patients?" She laughed merrily.

"Not if I can help it. Many of my experiments require apparatus that must not be disturbed. So I had one end of the basement bricked in for a laboratory, and the only entrance is a stairway reached by this panel."

"And are you the only person who ever enters?"

"The only person." He bowed, and waved her to her chair.

"How interesting! Oh John, won't you let me just peek?"

He hesitated. There had been a certain mysterious satisfaction to him in making this laboratory the shrine of his absolute seclusion. But he wished to deny nothing to Enid Crane. In his heart he made no secret of his feeling toward her.

She was an imperiously beautiful figure as she stood there beside his desk. Her features had the classic virtue of being defined sharply, but without hardness. Her heavy black hair was drawn down in ripples under her fur hat, and in this frame the luster of her eyes and the red-

ness of her full lips were rare perfections.

"Come on, then, Enid," he said after a moment. "You shall see. But I'm afraid you will be disappointed. There's nothing gloomy or romantic down there."

As he spoke he took a small flat key from his pocket and opened the panel.

"Once the lock is turned back," he explained, "the panel will turn either way on its pivot. Pardon me for going first."

He stepped into the narrow entry and turned on the electric light, then led the way down the winding stairs.

Enid Crane stared in amazement at the rows of jars and bottles on the shelves and at the complex apparatus.

"Who ever would have dreamed of your having such a place as this!" she exclaimed. She went over to the glass retort and stooped to examine its contents. "What is this?" she asked.

"Don't touch it!" Archer spoke sharply. As she drew back in surprise, he explained:

"It's a poison."

Her lips paled. "Poison?" she whispered, with a shudder. "What are you doing with poison?"

"Trying to get from it a useful remedy."

He did not note the relief in her voice as she said: "Is it so fatal that I must not even look at it?"

"No, but if you should slip and fall against it, or—"

But she had lifted her chin and turned back to the foot of the stairs.

"It is all very interesting," she said coolly. "Thank you for showing me." And drawing her skirt close about her, she climbed to the floor above.

Archer, as he followed, wondered at her sudden change of mood. Enid was a constant marvel to him. He had known her since they were boy and girl together. His father and hers had been close friends, and she and her brother Arthur had been his constant playmates.

But since she had become a young woman, he ceased to understand her. Her merry air of comradeship had given place to banter. She was charming but changeable, seemingly frank, but really inscrutable. Slowly he discovered that, where formerly he had thought of her as

a friend and comrade, now he thought of her very differently. He was eager to see her; once he would have been merely pleased. She was in his mind as something lovely that must be possessed. Since he was not blind to his own emotions, he came in time to realize that he loved her.

But how to woo her? That he did not know. Many times he wished that he had no basis of old acquaintance with her, but might meet her now for the first time, and from the start try definitely to win her. That would be easier than the difficult course of altering an old relationship which she, no doubt, supposed would never change, no matter how much they themselves might change.

Meantime, in the absence of Arthur, she had a habit—terrible to him—of making him her confidant regarding the men she met. Calmly she would discuss with him the advisability of marrying this or that "possibility." He did not like to hear her speak of men as "possibilities," and when she pressed him for advice, he would shrink back upon himself and ask, as coldly as he could: "Do you care for him?"

"I like him pretty well," was the usual answer.

And when he would say abruptly, "If you love him, marry him," she would answer:

"A girl has to marry. Why do you blame me for thinking about it?"

Then she would become cynical. And her cynicism cut him deeply.

CHAPTER II.

THE LETTER.

THEY were again in the consulting-room. Archer swung the panel to, leaving it slightly ajar, and turned, just as Enid sank into a chair.

"I'm glad to be out of that poison-shop," she said. "It affected me in an uncanny way."

He smiled. "One gets used to working with potent substances."

"But is it safe, John? Isn't there danger of making a mistake? If those poisons of yours are so awful that you can't even touch them—"

"It's part of my job, Enid. And it's

quite safe if one is used to laboratory work." He opened a drawer of his desk and took out the little vial of Exina crystals. "This would kill a regiment. But it won't be given to a regiment, or to any one. So you see—"

"Oh, well," she said. "if you wish to play with poisons, no one can stop you. I came to talk about Arthur and Uncle Abraham."

"Yes?" He put the vial back in his desk. "What is new?"

"Simply that uncle is worse than ever. You and I have talked it over before, John, but I think we'd better get it all straight again, before I come to the favor I wish to ask."

"Go ahead, Enid," he said. "You can count on me."

"It's five years, now, since father died," she began, "and since Arthur and I went to live with Uncle Abraham. It is two years since Arthur went to Paris. It is one year since uncle cut Arthur's allowance in half."

"Yes."

"Now, uncle announces that he is going to cut Arthur off altogether."

"What?"

"No more allowance for our rising young painter."

"Is he leaving Arthur out of his will?"

"That I don't know. He may be planning. But I am quite sure that he has not made a new will recently."

Archer considered. "What has Arthur done this time?" he finally asked.

Enid laughed. "He is studying art, and in Paris. I'm afraid he has not been altogether staid. But extravagance is worse in uncle's eyes than any sin."

Archer pictured to himself Abraham Walsh, with all his crabbedness and greed—a selfish old man, intent only upon dollars—and this beautiful niece of his; for in his way the old man loved her—loved her in spite of her cold contempt for him. Like a devil-fish with a thousand tentacles the rich money-lender sat in his invalid chair and reached out for more money. Business men hated to borrow from him, yet many of them were forced to go to him. Always he preached his narrow philosophy at them and counseled them to a thrift which his own exactions would not permit.

"How I hate him!" exclaimed Enid suddenly.

Archer was astonished by the intensity with which she spoke. He realized, too, that the hot anger in her eyes made her look like an avenging Judith.

"How I hate him!" she repeated. "You don't know how I shudder when he speaks to me. Sometimes I—well, I should be glad if he were dead."

"Enid!"

"I shouldn't say it, of course." She laughed bitterly. "But, John, you haven't the faintest idea of his hypocrisy and meanness."

"Possibly. But—"

"I will tell you something you don't know." She paused for a moment. "He ruined my father. He induced him to undertake foolish enterprises, lent him the money to carry them on, and when the time came to settle, screwed the last dollar out of him. He did that because he hated my father; and simply because he had graces and virtues which could not be bought."

"You astound me," said Archer. "How long have you known this?"

"Ever since it happened."

"Yet you have lived in his house?"

"Why not?" she blazed. "He knows that I hate him. I think he rather enjoys it. As for the money, it is rightfully Arthur's and mine. Uncle knows it. I remind him of it whenever I demand a check."

"And he gives you the money?"

"He does. But Arthur—when I make demands for Arthur, he turns stone-deaf."

Archer arose and paced back and forth across the room. He did not like this mood in Enid. Stopping before her, he looked at her gravely.

"Now, listen to me," he said. "You must not remain in your uncle's house. It is abnormal, this hatred—and it is due to your being there near him. Get away from him. This constant sight of him and the sound of his voice—it is unwise, Enid, for you to stay. The effect—"

"Good old John!" she exclaimed; and he winced a little at the words. "I am so much stronger than you think. Do not imagine that I fear Uncle Abraham?"

"No," he replied quietly. "But if I

were you, believe me, I should fear myself, Enid."

"Why so?" Her voice was softer.

"Because an atmosphere of hatred, however much it is justified, is never good for one. You should be happy."

"I am not unhappy," she answered slowly. "I am merely waiting."

"Waiting?"

"Yes, waiting. But forgive me. I shouldn't have bored you with this outburst against uncle. It was only that it relieved me—just as you men are sometimes relieved by swearing."

"That is just it," he began eagerly. "You ought not to need such relief."

"All right, John," she laughed. "Really, I am quite normal. Now, let me ask my favor."

With a little sigh he again sat down by the desk.

"I want you to write to Uncle Abraham," she said, "and urge him to do the right thing by Arthur."

"Me?"

"You know that Arthur really is making a name for himself. If you point that out it may have its effect."

"But your uncle won't hear anything from me. He hardly knows me."

"He knows a great deal about you. I have seen to that." She laughed softly. "He knows that, like Arthur, you have chosen one of the professions in which money is not the prime object, and he knows that you have already made a name for yourself. He can't help having some respect for you. He always respects success."

"But what would he think—"

She leaned forward imploringly. "Leave that to me, John, please. I've set my heart on your writing to him."

"If that is the case"—he brightened—"of course I will write. But it does seem an ineffectual thing to do."

"You don't understand. Uncle classes you as he would class Arthur, if Arthur were already successful in the sense of making money. Your letter may not move him, but if it will not, then nothing will."

He took a sheet of note-paper from a drawer and lifted his fountain pen. "You must tell me what to say."

Enid shook her head. "I don't need to tell you. Be your own straightfor-

ward self, and don't gloss over Arthur's faults."

"I doubt if they are bad ones," he remarked, pen-poised.

"They aren't—very. He's a bit haram-searum, but he will paint the better for it, won't he? Don't men believe that they must be careless, or immoral, or whatever you choose to call it, before they can paint or write or compose?"

"You don't believe it, at least?" he replied.

Then, as she did not answer, he devoted himself to the letter. For some minutes he wrote, his head bent over the paper. When at last he reached for the blotting-pad, and looked up, Enid was standing by the panel door.

"Oh!" he said. "I left it ajar, didn't I?"

"Yes," she answered. "Shall I close it?"

He nodded. The spring clicked as she pushed the panel to.

"You would add to the mystery," she commented, "if you fastened a bookcase to this side of the panel. Is the letter done?"

He held it out to her, and she took it and read it through.

"That is just like you, John," she said when she had finished. "It sounds as though you were saying it. Don't forget the return envelope."

"Return envelope?"

"Why, yes: didn't you know? Uncle never gives any attention to a letter unless a stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed. Even the great bankers have to observe this whim. It saves him the cost of stamps, and part of the cost of stationery," she concluded, with a laugh that grated on his ears.

He addressed an envelope to himself and put a stamp on it.

"It is all of a kind," she went on, "with his saving bits of string and keeping them in his pocket. He makes me pick them up for him."

She had laid the letter before him, and now he folded it and placed it, with the return envelope, in a larger envelope, which he addressed to Abraham Walsh. But before he sealed it she took it from him again, and reread the letter it contained.

"If this does not influence him," she

said, "there is nothing more to do." She sealed the letter herself, while he watched the red tip of her little tongue travel along the gummed flap. "It isn't just the matter of Arthur's allowance," she said irrelevantly. "I can manage that part readily."

"How so?" he asked in some surprise.

"Uncle gives me whatever I ask. I send what I choose to Arthur."

"But doesn't your uncle suspect?"

"He may. I never tell him what I want money for. The queer part of it is that I really don't believe he minds my sending Arthur money. He enjoys forcing me into subterfuges."

"Contemptible of him," muttered Archer.

"Yes—but—" She shrugged her shoulders. "What has most troubled me is the suspicion that he does intend to alter his will, and to alter it in such a way that, whatever he leaves to me, I shall not be permitted to give anything to Arthur."

"That would be hard to manage."

"You don't know his ingenuity, John. He would find a way, if he had to trustee my inheritance and arrange a full accounting of every cent I spent. But if we can beat him on this matter of the allowance—"

Archer looked at her intently. "Don't you think," he said, "that your view of the situation is just a bit overwrought—just a bit strained? The atmosphere you are living in—"

She raised a deprecatory hand. "We have been over that ground. I am not a bit overwrought, John. It is as natural for me to hate my uncle as it is for me to like other people; and I see no reason to hide my true feeling about him. Thank you for writing the letter. Come over and see me soon, won't you? Uncle retires at eight, and you will not be afflicted by his presence—unless he happens to learn that you are coming. In that case he would be quite capable of monopolizing you."

She held out her hand.

"Let me get on my things, and I will walk along with you," he said eagerly.

"And the experiments that I interrupted?"

"Can wait. I don't see you often, Enid."

She turned on him a dazzling smile. "Whose fault is that?" she asked.

"My own, I am beginning to think," he muttered, going to the closet for his coat.

As they were leaving the house he laid the letter on the table in the hall. It would be taken out with the other mail a little later.

The afternoon was crisp and cold, and for once the city streets were clean, for there had been a snowfall the night before, and the northwest wind had protected it from the smirch of failing soot.

"Let's take a turn in the park," he suggested, and at her assent they walked to the Fifty-Ninth Street entrance. Her spirits rose rapidly. The keen air seemed to purge her brain of all bitterness, and she laughed and talked with a happy spontaneity that Archer was delighted to see. When at last he left her, at the entrance of her uncle's house, and turned down Fifth Avenue, he said to himself: "I must go to see her often. Above all, I must find ways to get her out of that atmosphere before it blights her." And his heart sang a glad song because she had been so gracious to him.

Tousey opened the door for him.

"What time is it?" asked Archer.

"Half past four, sir," replied the man.

"That gives me a half-hour," said Archer. "Don't let me be disturbed before five—my regular consultation-hour, you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"I shall be in my laboratory."

When Tousey had helped him off with his coat he went through the long hall to his consultation-room. The presence of Enid still seemed to haunt the air, and he smiled as he unlocked the panel and went down the spiral stairway.

In the laboratory the memory of her horror of the poison recurred to him. He was himself affected by it; so much that, when he bent over the retort to examine the rapidly forming crystals, they seemed to flash a Satanic light at him.

Subtly malevolent were the suggestions that came to him. The lovely girl whom he had left so short a time before grew suddenly to be a terrible, avenging figure. He saw her as the embodiment of a cold, relentless hatred. He shud-

dered; then, realizing the morbidity of his fancies, he shook himself free from them and bent to his work.

The crystals still gleamed at him wickedly; but, after all, they were merely Exina crystals, which he was to place in solution, and then in a weaker solution, and then in a weaker, and so on, until he could employ it as a useful remedy.

CHAPTER III.

PLAIN SPEAKING.

ABRAHAM WALSH rolled his wheeled chair swiftly into the library. It was ten in the morning, the hour at which he invariably made his appearance, and Jepson, his young-looking secretary, was, as usual, awaiting his master's orders.

Jepson might well have suffered under the tyranny of his work, had he not long ago succeeded in subordinating all his thoughts and feelings to the bare necessity of keeping his job. Thus, singularly, he retained the appearance of youthful freshness by maintaining a consistent policy of self-effacement. He had permitted his magnetism, if he had ever had any, utterly to evaporate from the surface of his personality, and at fifty he was a useful machine that might have been mistaken for a plaything.

"Well, well," rasped Walsh, "you have been busy this morning, I trust—eh, Jepson?"

"Yes, Mr. Walsh."

Jepson, at the first appearance of the chair, had taken his seat before a typewriter. He made no move to help his master, for physical help was something of which Abraham Walsh desired as little as possible. To spring to the invalid's aid was to emphasize his limitations. The paralysis of his lower limbs made it necessary to lift him to and from his bed and to assist him into his clothes; but once established in his chair, his long, sinewy arms governed his movements with strength and precision.

The smile on Walsh's face this morning was a cunning, crafty smile. Jepson noted it indifferently. To him it meant merely that flies were close to the web.

"Now, then, let us see," said Walsh, with his note of false cheerfulness.

"Let—us—see." He turned his chair and wheeled rapidly to the low table on which the morning mail had been spread out for his attention.

"Let—us—see." He took up the paper-knife. No one was permitted to open his letters for him.

Rapidly he slit the many envelopes in one of the piles. These letters were all adjudged to be "business" by Jepson, part of whose task was to separate the envelopes the first thing in the morning. Wo to him if, through his inability to divine the contents of an envelope, he placed a personal letter in the business pile!

Walsh took a letter from its envelope and unfolded it, first laying the stamped and addressed return envelope in his lap.

"Here is something from our dear friends, Bellingham & Company," he exclaimed. "Hum! They want a hundred thousand. Go to the file, Jepson, and get the records of my dealings with them."

He read the letter again while the records were being sought. His eyebrows were corrugated over his narrow, light-blue eyes, and the corners of his wide mouth were now lifted, now depressed.

"Here they are, Mr. Walsh," said Jepson, handing to the seated man a sheaf of papers.

Walsh ran his eyes over them rapidly. "Hum!" he commented. "Very good, very good. I guess we shall have to let them have the hundred thousand; but for three months, Jepson, mind you, not for six, unless they are prepared to make a special arrangement about the interest. Write them to that effect, Jepson." He ran the tip of his tongue over his thin lips, with an appearance of great satisfaction.

While Jepson rattled out the letter on the typewriter the old money-lender continued to go through his correspondence. Two hours passed before the business letters were disposed of.

"Now," said Walsh, with a relish, "let us see what the beggars have to say this morning." It was his custom to assume that all personal letters must be appeals for charity.

He took up a letter. "Ah!" he exclaimed, "here is a young man who asks for a loan of three thousand dollars to

enable him to buy a partnership in a grocery business. He is modest—eh, Jepson?"

"Yes, Mr. Walsh."

"I suppose"—Walsh gazed ruminatively at the dingy old engravings on the opposite wall; one, a Landseerian stag on an impossible pinnacle of rock; the other, a much-bedraped female, whose pose was supposed to typify Hope—"I suppose it is generally believed that I could be the making of any young man whom I should choose to back."

Jepson glanced up furtively. His master's face wore an abstracted look of mild benevolence. Was there a genuine softness in the hard eyes?

"Everybody knows that you could."

Jepson hazarded.

"I could lift a young chap out of a clerkship and make him a power in finance," continued Walsh.

"Indeed you could, Mr. Walsh." Jepson tried to speak naturally; but a slight trembling of his voice betrayed the fact that he, for once, was creeping out of his self-effacement.

"Well," said Walsh harshly, "I'm not a going to do it. Let 'em do as I have done. Let 'em save. Jepson; let 'em save."

"Yes, Mr. Walsh." The secretary was back in the dust of humility.

"I suppose that you have saved something—eh, Jepson?" continued Walsh.

"A little—a very little."

"But something?"

"Yes, sir—something."

"Then, if hard times come, you can get along on a little less than your present salary—eh?"

Jepson did not answer, and a malicious smile played about the old man's mouth. "Let us hope that hard times do not come," he said. "Let us pray that they do not come."

"Yes, sir," replied Jepson. He was past being wounded.

"What is this?" exclaimed Walsh, picking up another envelope and glancing at the return address in the upper left-hand corner. "What does John Archer, M.D., want of me?"

There was a show of interest in his face as he took out the letter; but his eyes narrowed as he read, and in an altered voice he said peremptorily:

"Go and get Miss Crane, Jepson. I wish to see her at once."

Jepson hurried to the door, pausing only to say: "Shall I return with her, Mr. Walsh—or do you wish—"

"I wish you to be here unless I send you out," replied Walsh.

In a few minutes Enid entered the room. Jepson slipped through the door behind her and went unobtrusively to his typewriter.

"Good morning, dear niece," said Walsh, rubbing his bony hands together and bestowing upon her a look of unstinted admiration.

"Good morning," she replied coldly.

He gave a cackling laugh. "Affectionate—as usual."

"I am as I always am. What do you want of me?"

"What do I want of you? Can it be possible, Enid, that you don't want something of me?"

"Oh," she replied indifferently, "I never hesitate to tell you my wants, do I?"

"You certainly do not," he answered.

She was dressed to go out.

"You were not expecting me to send for you this morning? You were going out—eh?"

She looked at him contemptuously.

"Yes," she said, "I expected some word from you, but I thought that I would go out later. You have received John Archer's letter, I presume?"

"So, ho! Then you admit that you knew of it?"

"Why not? Really, Uncle Abraham, your efforts to make me lie to you are childish."

He laughed noiselessly. "You went to see Dr. Archer yesterday," he announced.

"I did."

"Is it customary," he asked, "for young women nowadays to pay calls on the men they are in love with?"

The angry, hurt reply which he may have hoped to extort from her was not made. Only by a level glance at Jepson, who was bent over a letter, did she give any sign that her uncle's jibe had annoyed her. She would have treated it as beneath notice if she had not known that he would not permit the subject to drop.

"John is my oldest friend," she said calmly. "He is nothing more.

Walsh looked at her piercingly, but her eyes did not waver.

"Have it that way if you choose, my dear," he said at last. "Now, what advantage did you expect to gain by getting him to write this letter?" He waved the unfolded paper as he spoke.

"John is a successful professional man," she said. "Before you finally decide whether or not to cut off Arthur's allowance, I wish you to know what another professional man thinks of my brother's promise."

"But I have finally decided. You knew that very well, Enid."

"Then reconsider." She turned to him with flashing eyes. "Reconsider. You will be sorry if you do not."

"I never reconsider," he replied dryly. "Come, we won't argue it. Give me a blue pencil, Jepson."

"But, uncle—"

"No more—no more," he snarled.

"You shall hear me!" she exclaimed.

"Shall? Shall?"

"Yes—shall! When you stole my father's money—"

"Stop!"

"When you stole my father's money, as you have stolen the money of so many others, your conscience may not have troubled you. It is going to trouble you now. I won't tell you what a loathsome creature you are, for you would not be capable of understanding what I mean. But I will tell you—"

She stopped short, for he had seized the wheels of his chair, and with startling swiftness sent it spinning toward her.

Within a foot of her he halted it abruptly. She had not flinched at his sudden change, and now she stared down at him with scornful eyes.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RELEASE.

"YOUR hate is very interesting, dear niece," he said. "I don't hate you, but I don't mind your hating me. I am like the Indian snake-charmer who loves his cobra." He grinned up at her.

"This matter of Arthur's allowance is settled," he continued. "You seem to love that worthless brother of yours. Even his immorality—"

"Who are you to talk of morality?" she demanded.

"I—am—seventy—million—dollars," he replied.

"And you are no more."

"This afternoon I shall make a new will." He raised his upper lip for an instant above his one yellow tooth. "Arthur is to be left out of it. He gets nothing more from me—nor from you, my dear niece; I shall arrange for that."

"Why don't you leave me out of your will?" she asked.

"I choose to inflict my money on you. Spend it on yourself as you like—or spend it on your old friend, this Dr. Archer—but you shall never spend a cent of it on Arthur."

She was breathing faster, but she did not take her eyes from his.

"And now for this Dr. Archer," he went on. "I will 'tend to his case." He wheeled himself rapidly back to the table. "I will 'tend to his case. Jepson, the blue pencil. There—there—one word on the back of his own letter. See? Just one word. Now, then—now, then."

He folded the letter and placed it in the return envelope.

"There will be no more impertinence from this young upstart. Mail this quickly, Jepson."

His malice and rage were terrible to watch.

"I am seventy million dollars," he repeated.

Then, with his eyes on Enid, he ran his tongue along the gummed lapel of the return envelope and sealed it.

"Mail this quickly, Jepson."

He held out the letter, and Jepson took it from his hand.

"Mail this—"

He clutched convulsively at the arms of his chair. His face turned gray. Some hideous change was taking place in him.

"Enid!"

The word was merely a gasp. With a shuddering sigh, his head fell forward between his shoulders. He would have

tumbled from the chair if Jepson had not sprang forward and held him upright.

"Quick, Miss Crane!" cried Jepson. "Lower the back of the chair."

Hastily she pulled the lever, and the chair-back slanted to an angle. Jepson took his hands from the shoulders and bent forward to examine the livid face.

"He has fainted?" asked Enid.

Jepson straightened up. "Miss Crane," he said, "I think he is dead."

"Dead?" She was surprised at his calmness.

"I think so."

"Run across the street for Dr. Waring," she commanded. "Quick!"

"And you?"

"I will stay. I am not afraid. Go!"

Jepson darted from the room.

Left alone, Enid looked at the thing in the chair. How swiftly it had lost its identity! It was not her uncle, she felt certain of that. The gazing eyes stared fixedly at the ceiling; the long arms swung limply from the side of the chair and almost touched the floor; the chest seemed queerly shrunken.

Perhaps he was not dead at all. There was a glass half full of water on the table. Dipping her fingers in the water, she sprinkled it over the brow, into the coarse gray hair.

"Wake up!" she whispered. "Wake up!"

But the eyes did not turn to her. Unwinkingly they stared at the ceiling above. What were they looking at? She raised her own eyes to see, following the line of those other eyes. In an interstice of the rococo plaster ornament, from which the chandelier depended, a black spider was spinning its web—spinning—spinning—weaving its gossamer back and forth, while those awful eyes below stared up at it.

The door opened, and Dr. Waring hurried in. Jepson close behind him.

"Lucky chance," he panted, breathless with his haste. "I was just leaving the house when—where is he? Ah!"

He stepped softly to the chair and looked into the gray face. He put his ear to the breast, and, after listening for a few moments, took a stethoscope from his pocket and, opening the waistcoat, knelt and applied the bell to the left side.

Soon he arose and put the instrument away. He looked at Enid gravely. "Mr. Walsh is dead," he whispered. "It was the heart. I have warned him often. Tell me, had anything occurred to excite him?"

"He was excited," said Enid, glancing at Jepson.

Her calmness did not seem strange to Dr. Waring. He had known Abraham Walsh for many years, and the wonder to him would have been that any one could grieve at his death. She might suffer from shock later, but the situation had not yet penetrated deeper than her reason.

"There will be no difficulty about the certificate," said the doctor, stroking his white beard thoughtfully. "The exact moment of death is difficult to determine in cases like this, and I got here so quickly that it seems safe to assume that he was still living when I arrived. Besides—" He broke off. "There will be no need for you to remain in this room, Miss Crane. I will take charge of everything. If Mr. Jepson will communicate with Mr. Walsh's business representatives—and if you will permit me to prepare a statement for the press—"

"Do whatever you think necessary," said Enid. "He had no relatives except myself and my brother, who is in Paris. Do whatever you think best. Jepson, will you please telephone to Dr. John Archer and ask him to come?"

With a last look at what had been her uncle, she left the room and went upstairs to her own den.

It was all so unreal, this sudden release. She did not hesitate to think of it as a release. This moment was what she had longed for—what she had hoped for; and yet, now that it had come, she felt no elation, no assuagement of her bitterness, but only a dull sense of empty possession.

Abraham Walsh, the famous money-lender and her uncle, was dead. By his will—he had made her read it only a few short months ago, in order to enjoy any hint of embarrassment that she might give—she and Arthur were the heirs of forty millions. The remainder was to go to charity. Twenty millions apiece! And he had died before he could cut off Arthur's share!

She could almost predict what the morning papers would say about the dead man. They would dwell upon his frugality, upon the rigorous maxims with which he had always defined his conduct, upon the useful place he had filled as a conservative balance in the financial world. They would gloss over his unscrupulousness, his petty avarice, his lack of human feeling.

What a pity that they had not heard those words that were almost his last—"I am seventy million dollars"! Were they not almost equal to the grand Louis's, "I am the state"? .

"I must not hate him now," she found herself saying. "I must not hate him now." And then she asked herself, "Why not?"

Was Abraham Walsh to be despised any the less because he was dead? Now that the gray conqueror had seized upon him, were his legal thefts repaid? What of the miserable wrecks he had caused? Were they to rise again miraculously to the surface of affairs just because he was dead? Her own father—were those last bitter years of his to be relieved in happiness because Abraham Walsh had been taken beyond?

No, she could give no love to her uncle, even in death. The last five years had burned too deeply for that.

Her maid knocked timidly at the door.

"Come in, Elsie," said Enid quite calmly. She even smiled faintly as she saw how sobered the girl was by the going of one whom she, too, had little cause to like.

"Can I do anything, Miss Enid?"

"Nothing. Oh, yes; see if you can find Mr. Jepson."

When Elsie had gone on the errand, Enid seated herself at her desk and wrote several telegrams. The first, a cable to Arthur, read simply:

"Uncle dead. Come."

Jepson soon appeared. His youthful face was red with excitement, and he was beginning to radiate a manner that indicated something like individuality.

"Whatever I can do, Miss Crane—" he began.

"If you will see that these messages are sent," she broke in.

He took the papers; and, as she noted the signs of his disappointment over the

triviality of the commission, she felt a touch of real pity for him. Like herself, he had been given a sudden release—this little old-young man. The doors of his cage had been opened: but what strength had he for flight?

"You know, of course, Mr. Jepson," she said kindly, "that you are down in the will for an annuity?"

She was astonished at the unpleasant gleam in his eyes as he replied:

"He twitted me on the subject often enough, Miss Crane."

"Try to forget that, Mr. Jepson," she said.

But he looked straight in her eyes and answered:

"I hated him, too."

This was a partnership of sympathy which she had not foreseen. Her feelings were so well known to him, however, that she recognized the difficulty of setting him in his place. Also, she was tired—too tired for struggle.

"He has been a habit with me," Jepson continued, "for twenty years, and for twenty years I have hated him. But all that time I have not let him see it. I have let myself be a worm under his foot. You don't know how strong such a habit has become, Miss Crane. Even now, when I went out to see about—necessary arrangements, I took without realizing it the letters which he signed this morning, and put them in the box at the corner—just as I have always done."

"And the letter to Dr. Archer—you didn't mail that?"

"That, with the others." He nodded. "I'm sorry, if—"

"I suppose it doesn't matter," she said; "though I wish it had not been sent."

Jepson remained standing before her. With every passing moment, his personality was expanding.

"I should like to thank you," he said, "for persuading him to put me in the will."

"You knew I did that?"

"Why, yes, I—he told me that I owed it to you."

"It seemed ungenerous for him not to do something for you," she remarked indifferently. "Did you telephone to Dr. Archer?"

"Yes, Miss Crane."

"He said he would come?"

"He said that he would be here within a half-hour."

"Very well." She nodded her dismissal; and Jepson, with a bow that was far from humble, left the room.

"What an awful death it was!" she whispered to herself.

CHAPTER V.

THE LAST WRITTEN WORD.

ARCHER was walking home after his call on Enid. He had found her in no need of consolation. There was not, in her manner, any trace of guilty shock, due to her remembrance of the hard things she had said about the dead man. But she had been uneasy, restless—expressing at one moment the wish that the funeral ceremonies might soon be over with, and at the next avoiding impatiently all recognition of her own responsibility.

"I cannot think of him as my mother's brother," she had said.

He was troubled by her mood, but as he thought over the situation, he was relieved by the conviction that the bitterness of years could not be expected to disappear in a few hours. The blighting influence of Abraham Walsh was still over her, but in time it was sure to vanish, and her true self would come to the fore.

She had told him enough about the circumstances to make him feel innocently involved in the old man's death. Was it not his letter that had aroused the fatal temper fit? If he had not written it, Abraham Walsh might at this instant have been busy among his papers.

Yet, since he had not known of the heart-weakness, he was in no sense blameworthy for being the exciting agent of the collapse. It gratified him, too, to know that Enid had never been warned of this danger that hung over her uncle. He could never now entertain the disloyal thought that she had deliberately, in her cold hatred, tried to induce his fit of anger.

Special newsboys were already crying the extras on the street. It had not taken long for the story of Walsh's death

to be inked on white paper. Stocks might go down for a time. There would be a hubbub of popular discussion. Moralizing editorials were, doubtless, already being written.

"Oh, well," muttered Archer. "He will soon be forgotten, except as a model of thrift for the young."

He had been summoned from his laboratory to go to Enid. Some of the Exina crystals—product of the experiment of the preceding afternoon—had been weighed, and now they were dissolving in a liter of alcohol. The strength of the solution would be tested, then to part of it he would add an equal part of alcohol, and so on until he had a solution of such a strength that a minimum dose would neutralize the effect of a minimum dose of a powerful heart-stimulant.

He gave his overcoat and hat to Tousey as he entered the house. He was about to go to his office, but the man stopped him:

"Excuse me, Dr. Archer, but may I have a word with you?"

Archer looked at him and nodded. "Come to my office," he said, leading the way. Seating himself at his desk, he glanced at his appointment-book. He was free for another hour.

"It's about the place, sir," Tousey began.

"About the place? Well, what about it? Aren't you satisfied?"

"I am and I ain't, sir."

"That's an odd way of putting it," remarked Archer.

"Well, sir, the work ain't hard and the quarters are comfortable—"

"Yes; go on."

"But—"

"But what?"

The man hesitated, and Archer looked at him closely. Tousey was not a figure of particular distinction, even among servants. He was tall and sandy-haired, and his brown eyes had a startled expression.

"Out with it," said Archer.

"Well, sir"—by all tokens the man was painfully embarrassed—"perhaps I had better give no reasons, sir, but just go."

"Go? Leave my service do you mean?"

"Yes, sir."

"But you've been here less than a week."

"I know, sir."

Archer studied him quizzically. "You were to stay at least a month, Tousey. You don't wish to leave me without a door-man, do you?"

"I thought the up-stairs maid might look after the door till you got some one, sir."

"Now, look here," said Archer, "you might as well tell me frankly what it's all about."

"It's—it's that," Tousey pointed to the panel-door in the office wall.

"That?"

"Yes, sir."

"What do you mean?"

"That place in there." The man's lower jaw trembled nervously.

"My laboratory?"

Tousey nodded.

"What has my laboratory to do with you?"

"You may call it a laboratory, sir, but—but I know."

"Know?"

"Yes, sir. Most of the money you have given me passed all right, sir—but that ten-dollar bill you sent me to the butcher's with this morning, they wouldn't have it."

"What was the matter with it?"

"They were on, sir."

Archer was still puzzled. "Let me see it," he said.

Tousey produced the bill from his waistcoat-pocket and laid it on the desk. At first glance it appeared to be a normal ten-dollar bill, but closer scrutiny proved that the scrollwork on the back was uncertain.

"Why, this is a counterfeit!" exclaimed Archer.

"Yes, sir."

"See here, Tousey," he said impatiently. "I wish you would quit beating about the bush and tell me just what you mean. What is the connection between this bill and my laboratory?"

"I don't wish to pass your money for you, sir."

"What?"

"I'm afraid of getting into trouble, sir."

Archer stared in amazement. "Do

you think I am a counterfeiter?" he demanded at last.

The man was silent.

The humor of the situation struck Archer so forcibly that he burst into a hearty laugh.

"Why, Tousey, man, what a notion. If I gave you a counterfeit bill, I didn't know it. Here!" He tore the counterfeit in two and took another bill from his pocketbook. "Take this one." He examined it. "I will wager that nothing is wrong with it."

Tousey neither moved nor spoke. He simply stared at his master with frightened eyes.

"You don't believe me," said Archer sharply. "Well, come and look at my laboratory yourself. I don't want such a notion in your head. Come!" He arose and stepped over to the panel.

"If you please, sir," said Tousey, backing toward the door that led to the hall, "I'd rather not see. I—I wouldn't know the difference, sir."

"Then, get out!" Archer's patience was exhausted. "Go as soon as you like—the sooner the better. Here—" as Tousey was slipping into the hall—"here's your wages for the time you've been here."

"I don't want the money, sir," came the trembling voice of the retreating Tousey.

Archer strode angrily toward the door, then halted, with a short laugh. The incident was most annoying. Tousey might spread rumors which would prove unpleasant. But after all, why should he worry about the gossip of servants? The man was evidently too stupid or too frightened to understand, but no one who mattered would entertain such a suspicion of him.

Therefore, he tried to forget Tousey, and having gone down-stairs and told Minna to look after the door, he telephoned to the employment agency to send another man.

As he hung up the receiver, he heard the area-door open. Tousey was leaving promptly.

Perhaps it would have been better to explain the situation to the manager of the employment agency. Other servants might hesitate to come, if Tousey passed his story on to them. But Archer did not

care to explain such an absurdity, and he returned to his desk.

Enid was again in full possession of his thoughts. He wondered whether he should have insisted upon doing more for her at this trying time. The right of old friendship for her and for the absent Arthur would justify his taking charge of some of the arrangements.

She had first of all sent for him. When he went to her she seemed to have no special demand to make, no story to tell, except that it was the effort in which she had involved him, the final effort to secure fair play for Arthur, that had brought the old man to his death.

Had she sent for him merely to tell him that? Had she desired reassurances which he had not been subtle enough to offer? He puzzled in vain to answer the question.

In spite of old friendship, however, he could not bring himself to press his services upon Enid. His own love for her was so deep, so intense, so more than merely friendly, that he could not force it to the restraint that would be necessary, if, in the next few days, she should break down and cling to him in the old boy and girl way.

And he did not doubt that she would break. The strain of five years in the house of Abraham Walsh must bring its result.

The day was certain to come when she would realize how far she had gone when she wished her uncle's death. She would regret those words which she had spoken in this very room. She would regret the hatred of the long, hard years. Then she would break.

The postman's whistle rose on the crisp air of the late afternoon. Archer glanced at his watch. It was nearly five o'clock. In a few minutes he would have to devote himself to a patient. Then there was a knock at the door, and Minna entered with a letter.

"Thank you, Minna," he said. "Tousey went in a hurry, didn't he?"

"Yes, Dr. Archer."

"Did he tell you and cook his reasons?"

"No, Dr. Archer. He seemed to be frightened about something. He has acted queer ever since he went to the butcher's this morning."

"Oh, yes. Well, Mr. Bentley will call at five. Take his hat and coat, as Tousey would have done, and show him into the reception-room. Then come and tell me."

"Yes, sir."

"And, Minna, a new man will be here to-morrow. Now you may go."

Dusk was settling down over the city. It was already too dark indoors to read, and Archer switched on his green-shaded desk-lamp. He glanced at the letter in his hand. An exclamation escaped him, for the envelope was addressed in his own writing.

Only once of late had he addressed an envelope to himself—to enclose in his letter to Abraham Walsh. This must be the answer to his appeal. He recalled Enid's brief description of her uncle's last moments.

"He was made angry by my plea for Arthur," she had said. "He was disposed to be malicious toward you for writing at my request, and he took your letter and scrawled a word on it, and himself sealed it up. It was the last thing he did."

She had not told him that after the old man's death Jepson had mailed the letter.

Here in his hand, then, was Abraham Walsh's last written word. He hesitated to open it, so uncannily did it come as a message from the dead. And it was an angry, vindictive word, he knew—a word written malignantly.

He turned the envelope over. The flap barely adhered. Plainly the old man had sealed it in haste, eager to send it to the man he wished to wound.

Archer drew a long breath. An open fire was burning in the grate. He had an impulse to throw the unopened letter into the blaze.

Afterward he was to wish that he had done so.

But, no, it was his to open, his to read, and the fact that it meant an unpleasant moment was not sufficient reason to evade the sight of the dead man's last denunciation. He pulled at the flap; it loosened easily.

Drawing out the folded sheet, he opened it up. There was his own appeal, in his hasty, slanting hand.

He turned it over. On the blank side

was the single word he had not wished to see—simply the one word:

“Fool!”

CHAPTER VI.

THE CLUE.

“YES,” he muttered, “I was a fool. I might have known that Enid was wrong. She was excited, and she thought that I could help. But I should have known.”

Simply the word. “Fool!” It was not so harsh as he had expected. Old Walsh had written the word scornfully, angrily; but it did not cut him deeply. He had been a fool, that he admitted; but who would not be a fool if Enid Crane wished him to be?

He picked up the empty envelope and gazed at it meditatively. The old money-lender’s last act; to call a man a fool; to seal the letter with his own lips in order that no jot or tittle of the enjoyment of his rage might be abated. The newspapermen would like to see that letter, that envelope. What a story it would be for them! How they would dramatize the last scene in Walsh’s library!

Archer arose and stepped over to the blazing grate. With a last look at the blue-penciled scrawl, he tossed the letter into the flames, and watched it flare up, then curl into a crackling cinder.

“So much for Abraham Walsh’s last will and testament!” he exclaimed.

He was about to drop the envelope into the fire. Holding it extended in his hand, he glanced at it. The flap had been bent back. The firelight was reflected from the gummed edge in a curious sparkling sheen. Archer did not understand that reflection; it was unlike any light he had ever seen thrown from a gummed surface, and the phenomenon arrested his attention. His interest in the unusual held him from permitting the envelope to fall into the flames.

Instead, he ran his forefinger lightly over the gum. It felt like coarse sandpaper—too coarse to be due merely to the cracks in the adhesive mixture.

He carried the envelope over to his desk and, sitting close to the lamp, scrutinized it more closely. The gum appeared to have been sprinkled with fine

fragments of glass. He reached into his pocket and found a magnifying-glass, and studied the gum through the lenses. His brow was knitted close over his eyes.

Under magnification, the shining coating of the gum looked, not like clear glass, but like fragments of a milky quartz.

A suffocating fear was rising in his heart. These shining points were—very like—but he must be mistaken. It was impossible! Such a thing should not even be imagined! These fragments looked like Exina crystals, but they could not be!

He would make a comparison. Opening a little drawer in the upper part of his desk, he put his hand in to get the vial of Exina. His heart pounded horribly. The vial was not there. Vainly he searched: he even pulled the drawer completely out, but it was empty. And yet he remembered distinctly having put the vial back after showing it to Enid—Ah! Why did her name come into his mind?

Through every drawer of the desk he searched. The vial was in none of them. With the cold sweat standing out on his forehead, he hunted through his pockets. Perhaps his memory of putting it back in the drawer was false. He turned his wastepaper-basket upside down. He got down on his hands and knees and peered about the floor. The little vial of Exina crystals was not to be found.

At last he stood erect, staring with unseeing eyes at the wall.

“Great God!” he whispered.

But, even now, his suspicion was only a suspicion. Perhaps he had left the vial in the laboratory. The hope aroused in him by this possibility sent him to the panel-door, and he unlocked it and hurried down the spiral stairs, trying all the time to remember whether he had found it necessary to use the vial during the day. It was not in the laboratory. The solution he had made was there; everything was in order, everything was accounted for.

After a hurried and frantic examination of the room, he went back up the stairs, remembering, while on the way, that he had left the envelope lying on his desk.

That had been careless of him. Some

one might come in and find it. But of course no one would understand.

Nevertheless, he was relieved to see that it still lay where he had placed it, and he snatched it up and thrust it into a drawer.

There was a knock. Minna entered.

"Mr. Bentley has come, doctor."

"Bentley—Bentley—who?"

"Mr. Bentley. You were expecting him, doctor." Minna's blue eyes were wide with astonishment.

"Was I?" said Archer vaguely. "Oh, yes. I can't see him now."

"He had an appointment," ventured Minna.

"Tell him an emergency has arisen. Tell him that it's a matter of life and death. Ask him to come to-morrow, at the same hour, if he can. It's life and death, Minna. Be sure to tell him."

The door closed, but Archer scarcely heard it, for his thoughts were again on the envelope and the missing vial. His hope clung suddenly to one fact; he was, as yet, by no means sure that any connection existed between the one and the other. There must be a test.

Taking the envelope from the drawer in which he had placed it, he opened a door which led into a little wash-room where a number of cavy's were running about in their cages. He had bought a dozen for his experiments with Exina. One had already been sacrificed. He did not like to kill living things, but there had been no other way to prove the potency of Exina, and he knew that the death it brought was painless.

The little animals set up a great squealing when he entered. They had already grown to associate his coming with the prospect of something to eat. Archer glanced at them.

"One—two—three—four—five—six—seven—eight—nine—ten," he counted absently, and started when he realized that one was missing. There should be eleven; actually there were only ten. This was quite contrary to the commonly observed phenomenon of the cavy. But he did not stop to investigate.

He opened the small blade of his pocket-knife. Carefully he scraped a minute quantity of the tiny crystals from the envelope, and held the knife steady so that none of the substance would fall to

the floor. Then he reached into the top of the nearest cage and lifted out a cavy. The furry thing huddled itself into his palm and betrayed its annoyance by clicking its teeth together. He could feel its heart beat. It was not accustomed to being handled.

Archer forced the animal's mouth open. With steady fingers he laid the knife-blade on the little red tongue. In an instant the heart-beat stopped. The muscles by which the tiny claws gripped his palm suddenly relaxed. The cavy was dead.

Quietly Archer laid the lifeless animal on the table, and stood there rigid, his lips a tight line. His hopeful doubts had been terribly resolved; for he knew that the crystals which had killed the cavy had killed Abraham Walsh. There was absolutely no question about it; the moment the old man's tongue touched the gummed flap of the envelope, he was doomed to a swift, sure death.

The horrible crime had been ingeniously planned. The only evidence that could establish the crime at all was the envelope, and it was but by the merest chance that he had noticed the poisoned gum. One chance in a thousand that any one would ever discover the evidence—no, one chance in a million—and that chance had fallen upon him, the one man who was in a position to recognize the potent Exina.

Mechanically he washed the knife-blade at the water-tap, and, wiping it on a soiled towel, snapped it shut. The fatal envelope stared at him from the floor. What should he do with it? To destroy it would be to destroy the evidence of the manner of Walsh's death. But even with the worst suspicions hovering in the background of his mind, he could not now bring himself to do that. He would keep it. So he went back to the consulting-room and sealed it up in a larger envelope and hid it away in his safe.

Sinking down in his desk-chair, he buried his head in his hands. His eyes were dry, but his heart was weeping.

Enid had persuaded him to write that letter. Enid had handled the vial of poison. Enid had declared her hatred for her uncle and her wish that he might die.

Could the cunning malevolence of Abraham Walsh have hounded her to so desperate a thing? It was unbelievable. He must not let the suspicion enter his thoughts. The poison might have been put on the envelope by accident.

As for the missing vial, he had no real reason to think that she had taken it. A more careful search might still discover it in some nook or corner.

Or Tousey might have stolen it; he had not thought of that. Should he hunt for Tousey, and demand the missing poison? If Tousey had not taken it, such a demand would offer a hint in a quarter where it might prove dangerous. For Tousey, with his stupid suspicions that his former master was a counterfeiter, would spread a more threatening rumor, if he coupled the idea of poison with the idea of bad money.

There might even be an investigation. Some sharp detective might discover how old Walsh had died. And then—and then—would not the suspicion rest on Archer himself? Better so than that Enid should be held guilty.

But before anything else he must find out whether she had taken the vial. He could not rest; he could not drive his doubts of her away until he knew.

He went to the telephone and gave her number.

When she had been summoned by a servant, and he heard her voice over the wire, he could hardly speak. With an effort he managed to say:

"Enid, this is John. Do you remember that little vial of poison I had in my desk yesterday?"

"Yes." The answer was unhesitating.

"It—it is missing," he faltered.

"I know it," she replied calmly. "I took it."

"What?"

"When you had put it back in the drawer you turned away for a moment, and I got it and hid it in my muff."

"Why—why did you?" "The words were almost strangled in his throat.

"That is something I won't tell you—at least, not now," she replied.

This answer seemed to be given reluctantly. Archer hesitated, striving by an effort of will to quiet his pounding heart.

"What have you done with the rest of it?" he asked.

"With the rest of it?" She seemed to be surprised.

"What have you done with it?"

"It is destroyed. I put it in the fire this morning."

He could not trust himself to speak again. He hung up the receiver, and, stumbling to the couch that stood against the wall near by, threw himself upon it heavily.

CHAPTER VII.

VANISHING SHADOWS.

THE funeral of Abraham Walsh was over. A famous clergyman had said what he could find to say of good about the dead man, basing his eulogy upon the homely traits of patience, thrift, and frugality, and cking out the gray sum of virtues with the color of general moralization.

The financial district had settled down to the adoption of such rearrangements as were made necessary by the disappearance of a source of large loans. The public was giving its attention to the question of the disposition of the fortune.

Then the terms of the will were announced. Thirty millions was a huge sum to go to charity; and there was a chorus of acclaim, tempered by the half-smothered suggestion of tainted wealth, and much speculation as to the manner in which the fund would be administered.

During this period John Archer went about his duties as usual; but he felt as if there were an iron band around his heart. He had not been to see Enid, though she was always in his thoughts; he had not dared to see her; he could not trust himself to talk with her. She would be busy, he knew. There was much to be done to rearrange her manner of life; and other friends were with her; he would not be missed.

His dreadful suspicion of her seemed to be justified by every circumstance. But there were times when his soul protested against any belief in her guilt—when he said to himself:

"All the evidence in the world will not make me believe ill of her. Even should she herself say that she did the thing, I will not accept her word."

Then the glow of these intense mo-

ments of faith would fade, and dark doubts would creep into his brain. Faith, he would realize, had returned only because he loved Enid; and faith could not deny the facts.

Yes, he loved her still—loved her more than before—loved her in spite of everything. Almost he stood ready to go to her and declare his love, and insist upon sharing the burden of her secret. But that, his reason told him, would sooner or later bring added unhappiness to them both. There were the years to face.

He felt no blame for her. How terribly she had been tried none knew better than he. After all, a man who lived as Walsh had lived was better dead. Hardly responsible, she was the instrument of Fate—and the victim of Fate, as well. Loving her, he could only pity.

Two days after the funeral he received a note from her—a few lines asking him to call—no clue to her feelings. He had to go, of course. He found, to his surprise, that he wanted to go—was relieved by the knowledge that she wanted him. To continue under the secret strain of the past few days was impossible; much better to face the issue if she cared to raise it; or at least to learn into her state of mind.

Perhaps she would justify herself in some way of which he could not dream. There was still the possibility that the use to which the poison had been put had been due to a dreadful mistake.

When he got to the house—within half an hour after receiving her note—he was shown into the reception-room. Jepson passed the doorway and, glancing in, halted and entered.

"Ah, Dr. Archer," he exclaimed, stepping quickly across the room and extending his hand. "How do you do?"

"How do you do?" replied Archer. He was astounded at the man's assurance. Surely this was not the humble Jepson who had slaved for old Walsh—this sleek, important creature. But he took the extended hand.

"There has been a great deal to do," said Jepson, "but gradually affairs are being straightened out. This has been a great release for me—a great release."

"You mean the death of Mr. Walsh?" inquired Archer coolly.

"Why, yes. I clung to him for a great many years against my will. But he needed me, and I hadn't the heart to leave him."

"Indeed." Such talk coming from Jepson was incomprehensible.

"Aside from his physical infirmities he was helpless in many ways. It is pleasant now to think that he was not without gratitude. You have heard that he remembered me very well."

"An annuity, was it not?"

"Yes; and of fair amount." Jepson stroked his chin. "A lump sum would have been preferable. I could have made use of it."

Had the annuity gone to Jepson's head before it reached his pocket? Archer began to think so.

"And what are you going to do now?" he asked.

Jepson threw out his chest slightly. "I shall open an office down-town—a brokerage business. You see, Dr. Archer, during the years I have been with Mr. Walsh I have set aside a little sum. I may even go as far as to admit that, knowing the quarters in which Mr. Walsh was lending money, I was able from time to time to invest my savings very profitably—on margin, of course."

"That is an admission I should hesitate to make if I were you, Jepson," said Archer dryly.

"Yes, yes. Quite so." Jepson blinked.

"Mr. Walsh did a great deal for you," continued Archer, thinking it time that the little man should be put in his place.

An ugly gleam appeared in Jepson's eyes. "He did no more than he should." His mouth twisted unpleasantly. "I hated the man," he added.

"Hated your benefactor?" Archer was becoming interested.

"Loathed him; detested him. I did not let myself care at the time, but—" He stopped abruptly.

A throng of startling surmises thronged through Archer's brain. Enid was not the only person who had hated Abraham Walsh. Nor was she the only person who had handled the poisoned envelope. What if Jepson, maddened by years of abuse, had brought about the old man's death?

There was the question of the vial of poison. Enid admitted having taken it. But since she had brought it into this house, it was quite possible that Jepson had come upon it, and had helped himself to enough for his purpose.

The label on the vial had told the nature of its contents. The label had also borne the printed description, "John Archer, M.D." Had Jepson, having in his possession some of the poison, been cunning enough to see that by smearing it on the gum of the envelope he could avert all suspicion from himself? Once the letter was mailed, after old Walsh had sealed it, the evidence, if ever discovered, would point toward Archer himself.

"Jepson," he said suddenly, "why did you mail that letter to me after Mr. Walsh's death?"

The answer came quickly and smoothly: "The force of habit, doctor. I always took the letters with me when I left the house, and, absent-mindedly, I did so then."

He was almost too ready with the explanation. It seemed to Archer as though the question had been expected, and the reply held in readiness. But the opportunity for further questioning was interrupted by the appearance of Enid. She came through the doorway with a sad little smile on her face; but it changed to a frown when she saw Jepson.

"Ah, here is Miss Crane," said Jepson. "Good-by, doctor." He glided quickly out of view.

"Oh," exclaimed Enid, sinking into a chair. "I wish that man would stay away."

"Why?" Archer could not hold back the question.

"I—I can't tell you. He is insupportable." She made an evident effort to speak more lightly. "He is expanding so since uncle's death."

"He is expanding too rapidly," replied Archer. "He may burst."

But he thought that he detected in Enid's references to Jepson an under-note of fear. Had Jepson found some way of inducing her to let him have the poison? In that case she might have been an innocent but conscious accom-

plice in the crime—innocent of specific acquaintance with his plan, but conscious that he had a plan to do something evil—and probably for his own release and hers. That would account for her fear, and it would tend to minimize her guilt if one took all the circumstances into consideration.

He looked again at Enid. She was dressed in black. Her face showed signs not of grief, but of suffering. She was paler than her wont, and her hands moved nervously in her lap. She was so obviously worn out that all the questionings of his mind gave place to a quick concern for her.

"You are tired," he said,

"Tired?" she answered with an hysterical catch in her voice. "I am so tired that I should like to sleep for a year. But I can't sleep."

He produced his fountain pen and a prescription-pad. "Here," he said, writing. "Send out and have this prescription filled. It is a mild sedative, and I think you'd better take it."

She took the paper, and nervously folded and unfolded it while she talked.

"The days have turned into years," she said, "each harder to live through than the last."

"Not quite that bad," He smiled with a stimulation of cheerfulness. "The week¹ has naturally been trying. When you have rested—"

"Oh, rest will not help me," she exclaimed. "Can't you see, John, that I am tortured? He is leering at me from his grave!"

"Don't speak like that." His voice was sharp.

"But the enormity of the thing I have done!"

"The thing you have done?" He could not look into her eyes.

"Yes—living in hate for five years; permitting the gall of hate to season my life; saying that I wished him dead." She broke into tears.

"Come," he said gently, "this won't do. You must get control of yourself. What's done is done, and no one knows but me."

"Oh, if it were only you," she sobbed. "But Jepson knows—Jepson knows."

"Knows what?" He barely breathed the question.

"That I hated him."

"Nobody can blame you for having hated him, Enid. Try to forget all about that."

"I can't, I can't," she cried. "John, you don't know what it is to hate. To be constantly near some one whose eyes, whose voice makes every nerve in your body quiver. To hold yourself calm and cold. There is no way for you to understand what it means. There, in your office, when I said that I wished him dead, I—" She broke off, and dried her eyes. "But this is an abominable way to treat you. I didn't send for you to make you miserable with my woes."

He was puzzled; but above all he was desirous that she should get a firm grip on herself. In her presence his suspicions of her were fading to shadows—even in spite of the damaging things she was saying.

"The worst of all is the money," she went on. "I don't feel that I can touch it—it was so much a part of him. I wish he had given it all to charity."

Here was the opportunity to suggest a course that might bring her relief. "You can do what he failed to do, Enid."

"What?"

"How much was your father's fortune—before he got into the hands of—" Her shudder warned him not to mention her uncle's name.

"About a million."

"Assume that half of that would have come to you, Enid. Out of the twenty millions that he left to you, keep five hundred thousand. Give the rest away if it will make you feel happier." Her eyes were shining. "It is a big price," he added.

"No price is too big," she exclaimed. "I will do it. After all, it was the money. If he had not left it to me I would not feel so badly. John, what would be a good cause to give it to?" She was leaning forward in her excitement.

"Slowly, Enid," he smiled. "There's plenty of time to think about that; and there are plenty of needs. Take time to think it over."

"But I can't wait. I want this burden to fall from my shoulders now."

"It will do that with your decision."

"But give me some suggestion."

He considered. "There ought to be homes for convalescents," he said after a moment. "Patients are turned out of hospitals when they are fit to go nowhere. There should be more places where they can stay while they recuperate."

Already her mind was busy with the idea. He had not intended to suggest seriously that she should give away the money; but if the decision to do so really freed her from the weight that bore down on her conscience, perhaps it was just as well. She had no need of twenty million dollars. She was not the kind of girl who could possibly spend the income of such a sum.

But was her despairing self-accusation altogether due to the fact that she had hated her uncle? If ever there had been excuse for hatred, it had been hers. However, he did not wish to press this question now.

"Don't give it all away this minute, Enid," he said; and her face was so much less unhappy that he smiled broadly.

"Perhaps part of it should go to other things," she commented.

"Perhaps."

"Universities, it may be, or—"

"Anything but libraries."

She looked at him reproachfully. "There," she said, "we will drop this for the present. But later I shall want your advice." She was rapidly becoming like herself. "What I really asked you to come for was to tell you that Arthur arrives to-morrow."

"So soon?" Archer was surprised.

"We cabled him about noon last Saturday. He reached the coast in time to catch a fast boat late that night. To-morrow is Friday."

"True. I had not realized—"

"Isn't it strange," she broke in, "that days can drag until every minute is an eternity; and yet afterward it seems as though no time had passed at all?"

He nodded gravely. She could not know that the description fitted his own recent experience.

"I wish you would go to meet Arthur," she continued. "I—I don't want to be the first to see him."

"I will go gladly," said Archer.

"Tell him—tell him whatever you please."

"I will explain all that I can."

She arose. "There are dress-makers waiting. I shall have to hurry you away, John."

He glanced at her black gown.

"I feel like a hypocrite to wear it," she said, "but there seems to be no way not to. Good-by."

He took her hand, and kept it long in his, while he looked searchingly into her eyes. There was no guilt in them; and yet she did not long sustain his gaze. Her lids drooped, and her mouth trembled.

"You poor girl!" he whispered.

On an overwhelming impulse he drew her into his arms. She buried her face in his shoulder, and burst into tears, crying her heart out. Then suddenly she tore herself away, and hurried from the room.

Archer was swayed by many emotions as he went to the street and walked homeward; but chief among them was the happy sorrow of that clinging moment. She had accepted him unreservedly as the shelter from her difficulties. He felt more and more sure in his heart that, however she might have been unconsciously implicated in the tragedy, she was not guilty of her uncle's death.

He had not questioned her again about the vial of poison. He felt that he did not need to. Whatever her reason for taking it, she had not meant it for her uncle.

A sudden surmise sent an icy shudder through him. Had her unhappiness been so great that she had been tempted to use the poison herself? Had she been at the extreme of misery when she stood in his consultation-room that afternoon? If it were so, he was thankful for the murder that had saved a life far more precious to him than that of Abraham Walsh.

But the mystery of the crime was still unexplained. Sure of Enid's innocence, he need not now hesitate to search for the criminal. If circumstances warranted, he might even lay the facts before the authorities.

It would be difficult, however, to prove anything. Exina left no traces in the body. So infinitesimal was the

amount that would cause death, that there was no likelihood of being able to find it. And to satisfy a jury that Abraham Walsh had been murdered would be almost impossible.

Jepson might have done the deed. In fact, Jepson seemed to be the only person, besides Enid, who could have done it. Jepson would bear watching.

CHAPTER VIII.

ARTHUR.

THE bows of the big Kaiser were encased in ice—the frozen spray of the heavy Atlantic seas through which for five days she had been plunging. As she moved majestically up the North River and turned in toward her dock, she looked like a sturdy messenger of storms. Thus, at least, it seemed to John Archer, as he strained his eyes in the endeavor to separate one familiar figure from the row that lined the rails of the approaching ship.

The expectant group of watchers on the dock began to show excitement.

"There she is!" exclaimed a girl near Archer, turning to her escort. "See! She is waving! I'm sure it is she!" And she swung her boa in the air.

An elderly man, standing close to an opening not far away, had formed his hands into a trumpet, and was bellowing through them: "Harry! Harry! Harry!" oblivious of the fact that his voice could not carry over the babel of sound.

Dock-hands were making ready to shove out the gangways. At the other side of the vast dock the roped-in enclosure of the customs was occupied by uniformed officials indifferently awaiting the rush that was to come.

The Kaiser was slowly moving into the slip. The rows of people at her rails were borne past the window at which Archer stood. But, look as he might, he could not distinguish Arthur.

That besabed woman up there on the promenade-deck, a little court of men around her, he recognized as a famous prima donna, coming for a three-weeks' engagement—and this excited man beside him, trying to attract her attention, was the impresario who had engaged her.

He saw other faces that he recognized; but Arthur was not in sight.

The ship was moored; the passengers began to stream down to the dock, to be caught by waiting friends and relatives, and welcomed with laughter and with tears of joy.

Archer waited. It depressed him strangely to find that Arthur lagged. Had he missed the boat, after all? No, that could not be, for his presence on board had been made known by wireless. Perhaps he was ill.

Then, among the last to come down the gangway, appeared a tall, spare figure. He was pale, even haggard, and his pointed brown beard for the moment proved so effective a disguise that Archer hardly knew him. But it was Arthur: a different Arthur in appearance, yet unmistakably he; staring straight before him, seeing no one.

When Archer laid a hand on his shoulder, he started, and turned with a look that was almost frightened.

"John!" he gasped.

His free hand sought his friend's, and held it in a nervous clasp. His breathing seemed to be perturbed.

Archer drew him aside. "Well, old chap," he said, "I'm mighty glad to see you."

Arthur's eyes filled with tears; and Archer's heart warmed to see how strongly his friend was affected by the meeting.

"Is Enid here?" asked Arthur.

"No. She asked me to come. She is waiting for you at the house."

Arthur showed unmistakable relief. "It has been a terrible trip—terrible!" he exclaimed. "I thought it would never end."

"Rough?"

"Oh, not that." He sighed, but gave no explanation.

"Well," said Archer, "a good night's rest will fix you up."

"The reporters tried to talk with me down the bay," continued Arthur, "but I wouldn't have it. Why can't the newspapers let a man alone? They pointed their cameras at me."

"That is the penalty of your double fame, Arthur—as a rising artist, and as the heir to a fortune. You have heard, of course. The will—"

"Yes, I know," he replied grimly. "Let's have it over with the customs. I brought nothing but this bag." He strode away to the enclosure, and Archer, following him, tried vainly to understand his old friend's nervousness.

The formality of the examination was quickly over, and Arthur, more like himself, took Archer's arm, and started toward the end of the dock.

"You must forgive my nervousness, John," he said. "I have been passing through an awful ordeal."

Archer was silent. He did not understand.

"You are the one person I most wished to see; and yet I did not seem to think that any one would meet me. I stayed in my cabin all the way over."

"Not a wise thing to do, was it? I should judge that you needed the air."

"There were people aboard I knew. I couldn't bear the idea of having to meet them—to listen to their curious chatter. I wanted to be by myself. I wanted to think."

"Has it done you any good to think?"

"No. There are some problems in life that can't be settled by thinking. But never mind that now. Let us get a carriage." They had now left the dock. He hailed a carriage, and gave the address—once, Abraham Walsh's; now his own, and Enid's.

During the ride across the ferry they remained in the carriage. Then, and afterward, as they rattled through Christopher Street and West Eighth Street to the asphalt of Fifth Avenue, they talked but little; though Archer, not altogether liking his friend's nervous silence, endeavored to draw him out about his work.

"You've been doing great things these two years," he ventured. "From all accounts your future looks big."

"They say so," Arthur sighed.

"Your uncle"—Arthur started at the word; but Archer continued—"your uncle got the notion that you were living the wrong kind of life over there. Enid couldn't make him understand."

"He had a detective watching me," said Arthur shortly. "I surprised him at it one day. There wasn't much of anything to say against me; but the fellow made the most of it."

"Your uncle went as far as that?"

"He went as far as that."

"What a terrible creature he was!" mused Archer.

"Don't speak of him!" exclaimed Arthur. "His arm is so long that it reaches even from his grave."

How like the words were to those of Enid! Old Walsh's personality still hovered about his heirs. Was that because, as Enid had said, his money was so much a part of him?

They came to a stop before the house. Arthur glanced at the ugly façade, and for a moment he shrank back; then, drawing a deep breath, opened the door and stepped to the sidewalk. He handed a bill up to the driver, and took his bag.

"I ain't got the change," said the driver.

"Never mind that." Arthur turned to Archer. "I want you to come in with me."

"Now?"

"Yes. I—there are certain things to be said."

It was, nevertheless, with some sense of intrusion that Archer went up the wide stone steps.

A servant opened the door; but Enid was close behind him. She did not see Archer at all, but threw herself sobbing into her brother's arms.

"There, dear, there!" whispered Arthur, kissing her forehead lightly, and gently pushing her away from him. She became aware of Archer's presence, and smiled at him wistfully.

"Now where can we go to talk?" asked Arthur nervously.

Enid looked at him in astonishment. "Not now!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, now," he answered grimly. "I must have it over."

She stole a glance at Archer. "My sitting-room will do as well as any place," she suggested.

The words were hardly out of her mouth before he started toward the stairs.

"What ails him?" she whispered to Archer.

"I don't know." Archer gestured toward the stairs. "But whatever he wishes to say, I can see that it will be better for him to say it."

"John, I want you to come, too,"

Arthur called from the landing; and, at Enid's nod, he followed. She turned to him again at the top of the stairs, her eyes apprehensive, and seemed about to whisper to him; but after a moment of hesitation she went on in silence. Arthur had opened the door, and was waiting for them to enter.

Enid's sitting-room was sunny. It looked out over Central Park, and it was furnished as she had wished in a style much more attractive than the gloomy, mid-Victorian ugliness of the lower floor. But to Archer it seemed a place of strange forebodings. He looked about for some explanation of his feeling; noted the empty grate, the mahogany desk, the framed prints and photographs; and suddenly he realized that it was the nervous, pacing figure of Arthur that had made his spirits sink.

Enid had seated herself, and Archer followed her example; but the brother did not stop his restless walk, except to close the hall-door, and to peer into the dressing-room which opened off at one side. He seemed to be gathering resolution; nerving himself to something.

At last he halted before them, his hands on his hips. "The last week has been torture for me," he said. "I feel like one of the damned."

"Arthur!" Enid gasped.

"Yes, like one of the damned," he repeated harshly. "What do you know about it?—Or you?" He turned to Archer.

"Steady, old man!" said Archer.

"Steady? How can I be steady? If you had gone through what I have gone through. If you, with your upbringing, which was like mine, found yourself hating a man until you felt like throttling him with your own hands, and then—and then—" He averted his face. "Stricken down in an instant! When the cablegram came to my door I had just exclaimed: 'I wish he were dead.'"

Archer got to his feet, and passed his arm over Arthur's shoulder. "This won't do," he said.

But Arthur drew away. "How do I know," he demanded, "what effect that wish of mine may have had? They say there is power in thought. Then what may be the power of feeling?"

"This is sheer nonsense," exclaimed Archer.

"But I have felt that, too," said Enid shudderingly. "It is an awful thing to hate."

Archer looked from one to the other. Had conscience made them mad?

"This money of his; I will not touch it," Arthur went on. "It shall not burn my fingers."

"Except what he took from father," Enid faltered.

"No, not even that. It has passed through his hands."

CHAPTER IX.

THE DISMISSAL.

ARCHER saw that he must interfere. "This is overwrought talk," he said. "You have no real cause to blame yourselves, unless—unless there are reasons which I don't know—and I don't believe that there are such reasons."

"That is just it," said Arthur. "There are reasons which you and Enid do not know."

"What are they?" whispered Enid.

"My own reasons."

"Arthur," she cried, "you are not like yourself."

"How can I be?" He strode over to the window, and, throwing himself into a chair, stared moodily out over the park.

As for Archer, he was deeply troubled by this strange home-coming. The blithe, affectionate Arthur of old was gone; and in his stead was a strange, morose man who started at shadows.

"What are we to do?" whispered Enid, bending toward Archer.

"Give him time. He is oversensitive, and he is tired. Be as matter-of-fact and cheerful with him as you can. Above all, find something for him to do—and quickly." He was prescribing for her as well as for the brother, though she did not know it. To make her devote herself to her brother was to draw her away from her own self-questionings.

"I can find something readily," she answered.

"Are you whispering about me?" asked Arthur, without turning his head.

"Yes," said Enid.

"Then say it." He swung around in his chair.

"It's Jepson," she began. "I want you to send him away."

"Jepson? Oh, yes; what has he been doing. Everybody seems to be in trouble of one kind or another—except John, there. And Heaven knows we're dragging him into it fast enough."

"That remark is not worthy of old friendship," put in Archer.

"I know—forgive me. But what about Jepson?"

"He has annoyed me." Enid studied the rug at her feet.

"How?"

She looked painfully embarrassed.

"How?" repeated Arthur.

"John will excuse us," she said, rising. "No, sit still John." She went over to her brother and touched his sleeve. "Come outside with me a moment," she said.

"Isn't John to hear?" he asked as he followed her to the hall.

She shook her head. Archer could not see her face. Her move brought back to him his vague forebodings of a doubtful relationship. What did she know about Jepson? How had the man offended her? Did she fear him?

Archer's eyes fell on the empty grate. The pan beneath it—for it was an old-fashioned grate—had that appearance of dust which distinguishes whatever has held ashes. The rays of the afternoon sun straggled through the curtains, and fell softly on the fireplace. But in that mellow glow there was one bright point—between the ash-pan and the side wall of the chimney.

Archer bent down to see what could give such a reflection. He exclaimed aloud when he saw that it was a tiny vial. Another instant, and he had drawn it from its place.

It lay in the palm of his hand. The label was charred. But the letters, "EXI—" were legible. The glass had been browned by the heat, but it had not broken. Fortunately, it was thick. Fortunately, also, the stopple was of glass.

Within the vial lay the fatal crystals. Apparently they had not been disturbed. Just what portion had been taken out

could not be determined without a test. He had, among his notes at home, the record of the exact weight of the original contents of the vial. Another weighing would tell him how much of it had been used to end the life of Abraham Walsh.

He quickly wrapped the vial in his handkerchief, and tucked it into his pocket, thankful that he had been the one to find it. Enid could not have been apprehensive when she tried to destroy it, or it would never have been permitted to slip through the coals, and roll out of the side of the grate. She must have tossed it into the flames, and left it.

Archer blessed the carelessness of the servant who had failed to see it when the ashes were removed.

By her own account Enid had supposedly destroyed the poison during the morning after her uncle's death. For a day and two nights before that it had been in the house. Where? Had she left it lying where Jepson, or any one else might see it? He would ask her.

She came into the room while he was considering the best way of discussing the subject with her, and wondering when he might broach it.

"Arthur has gone down to the library to attend to Jepson," she said. "Do you mind waiting here for a few minutes? It is very improper, I suppose, but the chaperon will soon return."

"After attending to Jepson?"

"Yes." She sighed wearily. "There has been no excuse for his staying so long. But he has taken many duties on himself. I don't know exactly what to do about it. I think that he has been prying into uncle's private papers."

"Tell me, Enid," he said with sudden earnestness, "why won't you explain what Jepson did to annoy you?"

"Foolish embarrassment. I'm afraid. But I will tell you, John."

"Not if you don't wish to."

"He has been trying to make me marry him."

"Jepson?"

She nodded.

"But what—?"

"It seems that he has long cherished a hope. The awkward part of it is that I tried to be friendly to him before uncle

died. He appeared to be so cowed, so abject."

"You used to talk with him about your uncle?"

She gave an hysterical little laugh. "Absurd, wasn't it? But there seemed to be no one to whom I could turn. I asked him last week if, from his long service with uncle, he could give me any advice as to a way of influencing a better treatment of Arthur. It was he who suggested that I ask you to write to uncle about it."

"What!"

"Why, yes."

"Are you sure, Enid? This is important."

"How serious you are! Why should it be important?"

"Never mind that now, Enid. But tell me, are you absolutely certain that Jepson advised you to ask me to write that letter?"

"Absolutely certain. I suppose I might have told you, but I felt rather silly about it. He seemed such a weak reed to lean on. It was only because he knew uncle's ways even better than I did."

Archer was stunned. He no longer had the least doubt that Jepson was the murderer. The motive was fairly plain. In all probability he had acted partly from hatred, and partly from a desire to improve his own position. By working upon Enid's self-blame for her expressed hatred of her uncle, and by trying to associate himself sympathetically with her, he had aimed to draw her into marriage. A great stake the little slave had played for.

"And he dared to want to marry you?" Archer muttered.

"I don't like to think about it," she sighed. "He is an abominable little person." He watched her admiringly. Her old grace had come back to her within the day.

"If only Arthur will be like himself," she said after a moment, "I could almost be happy again. I feel better now about—about uncle. Not having to take his money—"

"Enid, he wanted you to have it."

"I know it, John; but I don't want it."

"He was a terrible old man," Archer

remarked. "He made everybody hate him. I know I should have hated him if I had had to be with him."

"Would you?" she asked eagerly.

"I surely would," he replied truthfully. "His treatment of you and Arthur would have been enough."

"I think I am beginning to see things normally again," she murmured softly.

"Of course you are, Enid." And under his breath he added: "Heaven bless you!"

Into this quiet mood of theirs Arthur suddenly burst.

"You'll see no more of Jepson, Enid," he announced.

"What did you do to him?" she asked.

"Packed him off. He's an infernally impudent ass. I have said what I wanted to say to you and John. There's no more to be said—now. I'm going to see if I feel enough easier to sleep. You'll excuse me."

And he bolted from the room.

The tears sprang into Enid's eyes. "I don't understand it," she whispered. "After two years away!"

"Give him time, Enid," said Archer. "I don't believe he has slept since he left France. He will be the same old Arthur in a few days."

But as Archer left the house he doubted his own reassurances. For Arthur was plainly keeping something back.

CHAPTER X.

THE VIAL.

IT was the morning of the next day. John Archer had sat late into the night, trying to arrive at a definite conclusion concerning the mystery of the envelope. Enid was now entirely excluded from his suspicions. The evidence all pointed toward Jepson—who had first suggested that the letter be written: who had possibly had access to the vial of Exina; and who had suddenly emerged from his chrysalis only to fly at once into the flame of an impossible ambition.

But Jepson's guilt would not explain the perturbed state of Arthur's mind. Something was unquestionably wrong

with Arthur. His remorse for the hatred he had felt toward his uncle—even when his sensitive temperament was taken into consideration—did not account for the change in him. Was he, in some secret way, leagued with Jepson? If that were so, in his nervous condition he would hardly have been so ready to drive Jepson from the house. He would have been more likely to dread the results of a break with his confederate—would have tried to soothe Enid and find an excuse for Jepson's folly.

To take the case to the police became a recurring suggestion. Such a step appeared to be his duty. And yet, when he thought of the scandal that would follow—how Enid and Arthur might be made to lay bare before the public the story of their relations with their uncle; how Jepson might vulgarly vaunt himself and proclaim himself a martyr; how suspicion might fall upon himself—when he thought of these things he felt that, even upon civic duty, restrictions must sometimes necessarily be placed.

His own position, indeed, would be very hard to explain. Besides the murderer, only he himself knew that murder had been done. The proof of murder rested solely on the poisoned envelope, now in his safe. The poison that had been used was unknown to pharmacology, and the only existent quantity of it was in his own possession. If he admitted that the vial had been for a time in the house of Abraham Walsh, he would have to convince a jury that Jepson had seen it, and that he and not Enid had employed it.

No, he could not go to the police without directing suspicion to himself and to Enid. In his own defense, his frankness in proving a murder where none had been suspected, might readily free him; but how could he establish the innocence of Enid, which, for him, depended upon his knowledge of her character—upon subtle shades of meaning in her speech such as could not be described to others?

Then, too, in his own case, there might be complications. A careless statement, a moment of confusion, and he would find himself hopelessly entangled. Some unforeseen suspicion might be directed against him.

He remembered the man, Tousey, who

had taken him to be a counterfeiter. Suppose that Tousey, in his stupidity, were to come forward and assert that he had seen his former master dabbling something on an envelope. Doubtless he had used his paste-brush in Tousey's presence. What terrible significance might be given to some trifling incident like that!

The more he thought about it, the more he became convinced that his best course was to remain passive—to await developments. But there was one thing he could do: He could determine how much of the poison had been put on the envelope flap. That was a mere matter of placing the contents of the vial on his scales and subtracting the weight from the original weight, as entered in his note-book. Useless work, it might be called; but it was something to do in the interest of exactness.

And so, that morning, he took the vial, still wrapped in the handkerchief, from his safe—where he had placed it when he brought it home—and carried it down the spiral stairs to the laboratory. He lifted the protecting bell of glass from the delicate scales. When he tried to draw the stopple from the vial, however, he found that the effect of the heat in Enid's grate had been to fix it in too tightly for removal. Accordingly he broke the vial, carefully holding it inverted and chipping a hole in the bottom.

Gently he poured the tiny crystals into one pan of the scales. Then he laid the weights in the other pan until the two pans balanced. The crystals weighed exactly eight decigrams and seven milligrams.

To be accurate, he reexamined the vial. No crystals remained in it. He then refitted, to the bottom of the vial, the pieces which he had chipped from it, and found that the edges united perfectly. No fragment of the glass could have dropped in among the crystals to add to their weight.

The next step was to examine his notes. There was the book, lying on the table. He turned the pages till he found the record of his first experiment with Exina. Yes, the weight of the contents of the vial was entered, but—

He looked again. Indubitably the figures read, "eight decigrams, seven milligrams."

He turned in bewilderment to the scales. The little heap of crystals was still balanced by the weights in the other pan. Again and again he added up the total of the tiny weights, and always with the one result—eight decigrams and seven milligrams.

It was inexplicable. By the evidence of the scales and the evidence of the note-book, the vial, when he brought it back, contained exactly the same quantity of Exina that he had placed in it two weeks ago! None of the poison had been removed from the vial while it was in Enid's possession!

Could these crystals have the property of gaining weight? That seemed impossible. Had the murderer, after taking out as much of the poison as he required, have made up the quantity in the vial by putting in crystals of another kind? He could not have made a compensation so exact, without the most delicate apparatus and the most careful experimentation. Then had he himself set down the wrong weight in his note-book? Had he written, "eight decigrams seven milligrams," when he should have written, "eight decigrams seven *centigrams*?" Of course, such an error was possible, but, knowing his own careful habits he could not believe that he had made such a mistake.

He was confused, bewildered. Certainly the gummed flap of that return-envelope had been covered with Exina crystals. Why, as he came to think of it, the envelope must have carried nearly as much as half the contents of the vial! And yet, all the Exina in the world was here in this room!

Had he made a fearful blunder? Had he been deceived by a similarity? Were the crystals on the envelope harmless fragments of the adhesive gum? No, for there was the cavy that had died when scrapings from the envelope were dropped upon its tongue. The poison on the envelope was certainly Exina. It looked like it, and it acted like it. No other poison operated in the same way.

Archer sat down on his stool. He was completely baffled.

While he was puzzling, going over and over in his mind the contradictory facts, the telephone buzzed, and the voice of Martin, his new man, informed him that

Mr. Arthur Crane was waiting to see him. Carefully transferring the Exina crystals from the pan of the scales to a fresh vial and labeling it, Archer cleaned the scales thoroughly and went up-stairs. He found Arthur in the reception-room and took him back to the consultation-room.

The night, apparently, had brought little benefit to Arthur. His long, straight nose looked pinched and sharp, and his eyes were unsteady. His normal, erect carriage, moreover, had given way to an uncertain stoop, as though the high shoulders were carrying a burden too heavy for them. He glanced absently about the room. It had been altered but little during the two years of his absence, yet the familiar place seemed to arouse no friendly memories in him. He threw a glance at Archer, then turned abruptly to the window and drummed upon the pane with his fingers, and at last left the window and threw himself into a chair and stared into the open fire.

"John," he began, without taking his eyes from the blaze.

"Well?"

Silence for a moment, and then:

"John, what killed uncle?"

The question was blurted out hurriedly. Archer, though expecting the unexpected, was so taken by surprise that he did not immediately reply. How much did Arthur know? Did he know anything at all of the matter; or was he, on the basis of some morbid fancy, hazarding a guess?

"Why don't you answer me, John?" Arthur's voice was low and intense. "What killed uncle?"

"Poison," said Archer.

"God!"

It was the anguished cry of a broken man. He had covered his face with his long hands: his shoulders shook silently.

Archer waited. The moments were full of portent, but he must not be the first to speak. So Arthur continued his struggle for self-mastery while the mantel-clock ticked off five crawling minutes.

The fire crackled cheerfully. From the street without came the voice of an old-clothes man, and the servants could

be heard below, moving about their duties. The winter sun came slanting in at the window, and lay in a long red stain across the rug. Arthur still sat in agonized silence.

There was a gentle tap at the door, and Martin opened it a few inches and thrust in his head to make an announcement. Archer frowned slightly and gestured him away. The door was quietly closed again. But Archer did not move.

Time crept on. Some tradesman rang the area-bell, and the steps of the cook could be heard going through the passage beneath. A coal in the grate rattled to the hearth.

At last Arthur raised his head. His eyes were gentler, steadier; his hands rested on the arms of his chair.

"I wish you would tell me everything you know about it," he said.

"I really know very little," Archer tried to speak calmly. "The day before your uncle died, I wrote him a letter, and enclosed the return envelope upon which he always insisted. It was a letter about you, Arthur—urging him to reconsider his decision to cut you off. When he read the letter he became very much excited, I am told. He scribbled an abusive word on the back of it, thrust it into the return envelope, and sealed it with his own lips. Another instant, and he was dead. Jepson mailed the letter to me. When I received it I noticed something odd about the gum on the flap, and a little investigation showed me that there was enough poison adhering to the gum to kill a hundred men. It could not have got there by accident."

"No," said Arthur with surprising calmness, "it was not an accident."

"The poison is of a kind that leaves no traces," continued Archer. "It simply stops the action of the heart. I am acquainted with the poison, because I have lately extracted it from the leaves of a plant, hitherto unknown, which a friend of mine sent me from South America. So far as I was aware, no one had any of the poison besides myself; but I have been forced to the conclusion that I was mistaken."

"How did you happen to write to uncle?"

"I did so at Enid's request. She had your interest very much at heart."

"Enid asked you to?"

"Jepson had suggested that she ask me. Suspicion points very strongly to Jepson."

"No, it was not Jepson," said Arthur. "At least," he sighed, "I don't see how it could have been."

Archer knit his brows. "When you came this morning I had nearly decided that it was futile to try to uncover the mystery. You and I and the murderer are the only ones who know that a murder has been committed. So long as we keep silence, no one else can know. If it were possible to find the murderer and prove his guilt, then the facts should be given to the police, regardless of the unpleasantness that might arise for us all; but as it is—"

"Now, I am going to talk," Arthur broke in suddenly. "I am going to tell you a horrible story. It will explain much—why the crime was committed; why I have been so unlike myself."

He swallowed hard and leaned forward in his chair.

"As you wish," said Archer.

"I do wish to—and I must tell it. Listen."

CHAPTER XI.

A CONFESSION.

"WHEN I went to Paris, two years ago, Enid and I both agreed that uncle was a person to be hated and loathed. He had ruined father. True, he had taken us into his house to live with him, but we felt that he owed us much more than he could ever repay. What he did for us, for that matter, was done in such a manner that I have often thought he found pleasure in making us hate him.

"Life among the artists in Paris is free and unstrained, if we judge it from our standards. It isn't any great wonder that, after three years of repressed existence under uncle's roof, I threw myself into the spirit of my new environment a little more unreservedly than I should have done. It was more a frolic than anything else. But I worked, too."

"I fancy there's no question about your working," Archer put in.

"Well, during the last few months, as I read between the lines of Enid's letters, I could see that uncle was preying upon her character! There was a note of hardness that I did not like. I realized that she was living under a strain, and you can imagine that I didn't love uncle any better when I thought of her. It fretted me to realize that I was living the life and doing the work that pleased me, while she was virtually chained to uncle's invalid-chair. So I worked harder than ever, determined to wait only until spring before coming back to America. Then I would send Enid abroad for a time, while I fought it out with uncle. And I hated him harder and harder."

He paused, and, picking up the poker, thrust aimlessly at the fire.

"And then," he went on after a few moments, "one day I fell in with an American who was down on his luck. Somebody introduced us; I don't remember who. Salton was the name of the American. He seemed to be a pleasant, happy-go-lucky sort of fellow. By his own story, he had been sent over as a buyer for a firm of New York picture-dealers, and his house had failed a few days after his arrival and left him stranded. He was dickering by cable, he said, with another firm, and would have a new connection within a few days.

"I rather took to Salton. Perhaps it was because he talked of buying some of my pictures; but, aside from that, he was engagingly good company. Now I would give half my life if I had never met him."

Arthur arose and wandered restlessly to the window. He stood there, looking out, his back to his friend, and continued the story:

"One evening, less than six weeks ago, Salton and I were sitting together in a café. A letter had come from Enid that day, and I was feeling particularly blue about it. Salton rallied me for being in the dumps, and I told him something of my situation. It was foolish of me, but I felt pretty well acquainted with him by that time. The worst is that I told him how I hated

uncle." Arthur's words came with trembling swiftness. "I said that I wished uncle were dead. We had drunk a good deal of wine, you see. I said"—he turned suddenly from the window and faced his friend—"John, don't you begin to understand?"

"Go on," said Archer in a low voice.

"I said that I would give up half the money he was going to leave me if only he were dead within a month."

Archer gazed at him in open amazement.

"I didn't mean it," cried Arthur.

"Of course you didn't. You couldn't have meant it."

"I was thinking of Enid more than of myself. And the wine had made my tongue rattle. And I was criminally foolish. You do believe that I didn't mean it, don't you, John?"

"Yes," said Archer.

"Salton began to talk about premonitions. He told a lot of stories about people who could read the future, and all that rubbish, and I laughed at them. But he got quite serious about it. He said that every once in a while he had glimpses of things that were going to happen—that, if I would only stop laughing, he would tell me something that would interest me."

"Well?" said Archer, for the narrative had halted.

"I pretended to be serious, and Salton then said impressively that my wish about my uncle was likely to come true—that my uncle would be dead within a month.

"I laughed at him harder than ever. 'That old man will never die,' I said; but I had the decency to add that if a wish of mine could really end his life, I would withdraw what I had said about him.

"Your wish has nothing to do with it,' Salton said. 'Such events are determined by principles larger than one man's wish.'

"So I scouted at him till he seemed to grow angry. At last he set back in his chair and offered to wager me a thousand dollars that uncle—that uncle would be dead within two months."

"You took him up?"

"I accepted," groaned Arthur. "I was excited, and I accepted."

"Foolish, but by no means fatal. You cannot be blamed very seriously."

"But—but he got me to put it down on paper."

"Do you mean that?" Archer sprang to his feet.

Arthur nodded wretchedly.

"He made it seem the natural thing to do. The folly of it never occurred to me. I was thinking about winning the bet, not about the nature of the bet."

"And you wrote the wager down?"

"If it had only been written in the form of a wager! But Salton called for ink and paper, and scribbled this sentence:

"I hereby agree to pay to Arthur Crane the sum of one thousand dollars, in the event that his uncle is not dead within sixty days from this date."

"He signed the paper and pushed it over across the table to me. It was so much like an act of confidence that I wrote on another sheet:

"I hereby agree to pay to William Salton the sum of one thousand dollars in the event that my uncle dies within thirty days from this date."

"And you signed that!"

"Signed it and gave it to him. He folded it and put it in his pocket."

Archer's mouth shut grimly. He did not look at his friend.

"I did not realize the enormity of what I had done," continued Arthur, "until the next day. I awoke with a headache, and my memories of the evening were confused, until, while I was dressing, I put my hand in my pocket and found Salton's written promise."

"Have you got it with you?"

Arthur produced a pocketbook, and extracted from it a folded slip. Taking it from him, Archer read it slowly. It was worded as Arthur had said:

I hereby agree to pay to Arthur Crane the sum of one thousand dollars, in the event that his uncle is not dead within sixty days from this date.

WILLIAM SALTON.

"I tried to find Salton, to get the promise back," Arthur went on, averting his eyes from the paper, "but he had disappeared. At first, I was very uneasy. If an accident should happen to Salton, and my promise should be found

on him, it would look very bad. To explain the wager convincingly, and the circumstances that had led up to it, would, I knew, be almost an impossible thing to do.

"Salton had said that he might be called away suddenly, and, after a time, I thought very little of his disappearance. In fact, in a few days I almost forgot the wager. It had simply been a piece of vinous folly between two friends. The month would elapse, and uncle would still be living. But I resolved that when the time came for Salton to pay the wager, I would not accept it.

"Then Enid's cablegram came. It struck like a bolt of lightning. Everything was plain. John, I had not had a suspicion until that moment. I had not dreamed of such a thing. I had only foolishly tried to prove to a friend that he was not the prophet he thought he was.

"An hour after Enid's cablegram, another one came. It said:

"I win. Salton."

"That was all. But I knew what it meant. He had won, not a thousand dollars, but my soul. Thereafter I was to belong to him—utterly."

He stopped and waited for Archer to speak. Again the clock ticked off the minutes; again the street-cries and the subdued noises of the house came faintly in to them.

At last Archer spoke. "You have made a terrible mistake. Arthur," he said. "But I cannot hold it against you, and the world would not hold it against you if it knew all the circumstances. You have been punished; and you will continue to be punished, for you will have this secret to carry through life. But forgive yourself all you can, Arthur. You were led into a trap. You meant no wrong."

He held out his hand, and Arthur seized it and clung to it with a grip that hurt.

"We must deal with this man, Salton," continued Archer. "He is the only guilty one. You will hear from him soon."

"I have heard from him—this morning."

"What! Already?"

Arthur held out a letter, and Archer read:

DEAR CRANE:

I want to see you. You can guess why. At ten o'clock to-morrow night be at the corner of Lexington Avenue and Twenty-Fifth Street. A man will approach you and say, "Salton." Show him this letter, and he will bring you to me. Fail me at your own risk.

WILLIAM SALTON.

"The letter was written yesterday," said Arthur. "He means to-night."

CHAPTER XII.

THE EVIDENCE DESTROYED.

"YOU are going, of course," said Archer, handing the letter back to Arthur.

"I must. He knows I dare not refuse."

"I shall be there, too."

"I wish you could," sighed Arthur.

"I can. Be at the corner at ten o'clock, as he directs. I shall not go with you, but will follow, and see where the guide takes you."

"Salton didn't even trouble to tell me to come alone," Arthur folded the letter slowly. "But the precautions which he indicates show that I will have to. Had I better go—armed?"

"Certainly not," said Archer shortly. "When you find yourself with him, delay the conversation as much as you can. Be ready for my appearance. Above all, don't give him back this letter; it is one of the few pieces of evidence pointing to your own innocence."

"How is that?"

"If Salton had legitimately won a wager from you, would he write such a letter? If you had hired him to commit a crime for you, would he, holding the evidence of the bargain, have to write such a letter to you? No; you would then be keeping in touch with him, not he with you."

"Your distinctions are true, but aren't they rather too subtle?"

"I think not. Keep the letter, in any event."

"What on earth shall I do with myself till ten o'clock?" exclaimed Arthur.

Archer glanced at the clock. "Better

lunch with me here. Afterward I have a clinic and a few calls that will fill out the rest of my afternoon. If I were you I wouldn't go home. Enid might guess something."

"You don't think she ought to know?" suggested Arthur apprehensively.

"By no means. Some day, years from now, perhaps, but—"

Arthur showed his relief.

"If I were you," continued Archer, "I would go to a *matinée* this afternoon. Then come here to dinner."

"I feel infinitely better for having talked things out," said Arthur. "But it seems as though I should never shake off the feeling of guilt."

"That is something time will do for you. The only thing I can say is: Never forget that you are paying for a folly, and not for a crime. And don't grudge the payment, Arthur."

Strongly as he had sought to reassure his friend, Archer was far from feeling reassured himself. To Arthur any recognition of the fact that he had not meant to be at fault was a relief, for until now he had had no confidant except his own conscience. But the situation was, in truth, about as bad as it could be. With all his heart, Archer wished that Jepson might have proved to be the guilty man, rather than this unknown Salton, who held in his possession that damaging promise to pay.

Though he had spoken confidently of settling with Salton, Archer realized that the settlement could not easily be arranged. A villain, ingenious enough to plan and carry out such a crime, could not be blind to his advantage. He would demand millions, of course. The only hope was to get Arthur's written promise away from him.

Or there might be some unexpected weak spot in Salton's armor. That was to be determined.

What a fool Arthur had been! But, thank Heaven, he was no worse than a fool! How terribly he was paying for his folly! The scars of his suffering would remain with him forever. Well, that was something that could not be helped. Arthur would have to readjust his life as best he could. He must mask the tragedy in his heart, and show as brave a face as possible to the world.

There was, at least, much for him to accomplish with his brush.

"He will paint great pictures," mused Archer.

And Enid must now know. She, too, had passed through the fire, but it had not burned her. For her the curse of her uncle's malignity had ended almost with his life.

Throughout luncheon Archer held the conversation down to lighter topics. It gratified him to see that every now and then Arthur forgot himself and responded in the old way, chatting of his painting and of the days when he, Enid, and Archer were playmates. Afterward, when Archer started him off to the theater, he walked down the street with a step that was almost elastic.

Dinner was even more cheerful. Arthur talked quite normally about the play he had seen. But after the coffee had been brought on he looked up suddenly and said, with a painful smile:

"I feel like one of your patients, waiting for an operation."

"Forget it," said Archer shortly.

"Don't worry about me. I can stand it now."

Archer studied the drawn face. If Arthur wished to talk, perhaps it would be better to permit him. "Well," he said, "go ahead, if you want to."

"What shall we do when we meet Salton?" Arthur began eagerly.

"I don't know."

"You don't know? Haven't you a plan?"

"None, except to await developments."

Arthur sighed.

"We may have to pay more than one visit to him," continued Archer. "I fancy that he is a clever scoundrel. But remember, Arthur, your part in this evening's performance is to be at the appointed corner at ten o'clock, and let the lieutenant lead you to Salton. Once there, make all the delay possible."

"Do you suppose that this lieutenant, as you call him, knows the story?"

"I doubt it. Salton's secret promises to be so valuable to him that he will hesitate to share it. Moreover, he would have to admit that he had committed murder; and, while a thug might make such an admission to one of his pals, I doubt if Salton is a thug."

"Two hours and a half till ten," muttered Arthur, after looking at his watch.

"Yes. Now, I want you to go to another play and use up that time."

Arthur's face fell. "Aren't you coming, John?"

"I don't believe it will be wise for me to be seen with you this evening. The house may be watched."

"But where will you be?"

"I will go to see Enid."

"To tell her? I thought you said—"

"No, not to tell her. To reassure her. She will be wondering about you."

"I should have phoned her. What a thoughtless thing for me to do. But, at least, there is no Jepson there to bother her."

"Jepson! I had forgotten him. He seems to have disappeared from all our calculations."

"Yes." Arthur was once more under his burden. "I wish I could get rid of Salton as easily—of Salton, and of my own memories."

"We shall hear from Jepson again," said Archer noncommittally. "He belongs in this affair, though just how, I do not know."

A few minutes later Arthur set out for the theater. Archer prepared to call on Enid. With his mind on the later meeting, he went into his consultation-room to get a stout cane, and while he was there his eye fell on the panel-door. The mystery of the Exina returned to his mind. Had some other person in the world a quantity of the fatal crystals? Was it a mere coincidence that the poison had been applied to the envelope contained in his letter to Abraham Walsh? If so, how had the envelope been prepared at all, unless Jepson—

But he felt that it was futile to try to answer the question, since that same evening he expected to see the man who had committed the crime. He did, however, ask himself what was the reason for preserving the envelope. The crime would never get to the courts. The envelope would never be used as evidence—that was certain. With the further light he had gained on the case, his object in keeping it had disappeared. Indeed, its presence in his safe was a constant menace to innocent persons.

He opened the safe, therefore, and brought it out of its pigeon-hole. Quickly he tore open one end of the larger envelope, and looked within. Yes, it was there. He heard the faint rattling of some of the crystals which had become detached from the gum and were falling to the bottom. Better not handle it at all. Better destroy it. If one of the detached fragments, so tiny as not to be noticed, should cling to his finger or drop to the floor it might reach a scratch on a patient's hand, or he might unwittingly carry it to his own lips. That would mean death.

The decision was made suddenly. Since he could not prove Salton's guilt, he would not expose Arthur to the danger of a circumstantial charge. He tossed the large envelope, with its contents, into the fire.

And now no evidence remained of the murder of Abraham Walsh. It was just as well.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MAN AT THE TABLE.

TWENTY minutes later Archer was waiting for Enid. She came presently to the reception-room, a startled look on her face.

"Where is Arthur?" she asked, without greeting him.

"Arthur is safe, and well."

"He went out this morning, and has not returned," she said, explaining her anxiety.

"We have been together much of the day. In his nervous state I thought it wise that he should keep away from this house. After dinner I packed him off to the theater."

"Quite the right thing to do," she said, smiling with relief. "But I was becoming a little alarmed. He seems so queer. You don't think anything serious is wrong with him, do you, John?"

"I think what we both know—that he is extremely sensitive. Mr. Walsh's death was a shock to him—as it was to you." He paused significantly. "He will gradually come out from under the spell of his own feelings."

"As I am coming out," exclaimed Enid. "If I were sure that you would

understand my meaning I should say that I am thankful things are as they are."

"I understand."

But how little she really knew! At that moment she seemed so strong that he was almost tempted to tell her the whole truth.

"It has been a terrible time," she went on; "but I cannot be sorry, for it has brought its lessons."

He nodded.

"I shall never let myself hate any one again," she said.

"Enid," he whispered, "I want you to tell me something. Why did you take that vial of poison from my desk?"

The color sprang into her cheeks.

"For Heaven's sake, Enid, you were not so depressed that you—"

"Mercy, no! How could you dream such a thing? No, John, it was just a foolish notion that I had. It troubled me that you should have such dangerous stuff around. And you were so contemptuous of my fear of it. No, I realize that you didn't mean to be. But I thought—oh, it was absurd, of course—I thought that I—well—that I would make you feel as I had felt—make you see how careless it was to leave it lying there in that drawer."

"Did you care as much as that, Enid?"

"So I took it," she continued, ignoring his question. "When I got it home I looked at it for a long time. The little crystals seemed to be alive. They fascinated me. But, after a time, my fascination turned to horror. I thought of all the evil those crystals might do. So I thrust the vial into my jewel safe, and locked the door. All night I dreamed about it. The first thing when I awoke in the morning—it was the day uncle died—I got the vial and threw it into the fire in my sitting-room."

"It was not left lying around between the time you brought it home and the time you put it into the safe?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"I was interested to know whether you had been careless, too. But why did you feel anxious about my having it?"

She did not answer.

"Why did you care, Enid?"

Her face averted. "I did not like to see you run risks," she said.

"But you ran a greater risk than I, Enid. You handled that vial without knowing how dangerous it was."

She smiled shyly. "I admit that I was foolish about it."

"But are you sure, Enid, that the stopper did not come out—that none of the crystals were spilled?"

"I am sure. The stopper was in very tight. I tried it."

He shuddered to think of her handling the vial.

"I should have returned the vial to you," she added, "but I felt that I had been silly to take it, and I hated to explain. When you asked about it before, I didn't feel like talking of it. But I had to tell you, of course."

Her answers confirmed one important fact. The weight of the original contents of the vial had not been entered incorrectly in his note-book. The vial had not been opened while it was out of his possession.

Her mood was so sympathetic this evening that it was hard for him to repress the words of love he yearned to speak. The old bitterness had altogether disappeared, and with it the little air of critical aloofness that had made her seem so unapproachable. But he held himself in check. Not while Arthur was on his way to meet a great danger, not while his mind was charged with a mystery of murder, would he declare himself to her.

In the last few days she had unconsciously made him feel her dependence on him. The fact sweetened the memories of his own doubts and suspicions. Soon a happier time would come, when he would tell her of his love for her.

He left her at half past nine and walked rapidly down the avenue, filling his lungs with the sharp, clear air, and glancing with alert, interested eyes at the people he passed. All of them, no doubt, had their griefs, their regrets, their personal tragedies; for all of them were human beings, and trouble is not to be separated from human life. He, a surgeon, had reason to know.

As he mused on the ugly scars of old wounds which he had found in so many human souls, Arthur's case did not seem to him strikingly exceptional. His wound was fresh, but it would heal, and the scar would remain to warn him against ex-

posing himself another time to a danger that threatened his eternal happiness.

At Twenty-Third Street he turned east, loitering along, for his watch told him that it still lacked eight minutes of ten. When at last he came to Lexington Avenue and turned north, one minute remained.

A number of persons were on the street, and Archer felt fairly safe from being suspected by Salton's scout. Nevertheless, he was careful to betray no special interest in his surroundings.

Crossing Twenty-Fourth Street, he saw at the next corner a man leaning against the lamp-post. The guide, no doubt. Coming from the north was a tall, spare, striding figure that could be no one but Arthur. The meeting could not have been better timed.

Archer saw Arthur stop short as he reached the Twenty-Fifth Street crossing and turn toward the waiting man. Evidently the watchword was being given. Then something white appeared in Arthur's hand. He was showing the letter.

Archer had slowed down his own gait. When he saw Arthur and the stranger cross from the west side of the avenue he went forward more rapidly, arriving at the corner in time to see them walking east, in Twenty-Fifth Street. He followed at a distance of about one hundred feet, not daring to go nearer, and yet fearing to keep a greater distance, lest he lose them.

On to Third Avenue the guide led Arthur, and across the cobbles, under the structure of the Elevated railroad. In the glare of an arc-lamp, they stood out for a moment more distinctly, and Archer noted that the guide wore a little cap that rested lightly on a shock of the reddest of red hair.

The hair caught the attention of another person, a man who was lounging northward along the east side of Third Avenue. This man approached the crossing just as Arthur and his guide went by, and he stopped short, waited a moment, then turned into Twenty-Fifth Street after them.

About midway of the block the two leaders of this odd procession halted. Arthur bent down for a moment over his shorter companion, in the attitude of one

listening. Then, suddenly, he continued down the street alone.

The situation was not difficult to comprehend. The guide, considering it unwise to accompany Arthur all the way to the door of the house in which Salton was waiting, had given him the number, and himself was waiting to check the advance of possible pursuers. Archer noticed that the man who had turned into the street at Third Avenue also stopped short.

The actions of the guide and the man who was immediately following him were not so important to Archer as the sure location of the door which Arthur was to enter. Accordingly he started diagonally across the street, peering after Arthur, who had now got almost to Second Avenue.

Doubtless the watcher would have headed Archer off, if he had noticed him. His attention was attracted, however, by the man who was closer to him, and he started slowly back toward Third Avenue, so that he might meet the stranger face to face. Meantime, Archer saw Arthur turn and climb the steps of a house. He fixed the steps in his mind, by counting their position in the row of houses which began back of the stores which faced on Second Avenue.

At that moment he caught the sound of a short, sharp scuffle, and turned in time to see Arthur's guide struggling in the grasp of the stranger. Archer promptly crossed the street. As he came near the pair, the stranger clicked a pair of handcuffs over the little man's wrists.

"What's wrong?" asked Archer.

"He's wanted. An old charge." The stranger spoke with that gruffness which seems to be peculiar to the police. He glanced at Archer with such keenness, moreover, that it seemed wise not to show too great an interest in the arrest.

Men were running up from different directions. In the center of a growing crowd, the detective began to lead his prisoner back toward Third Avenue. Archer hurried away in the other direction.

Without difficulty he found the house into which Arthur had disappeared. It was an old dwelling, of dark, red brick. The sandstone steps had been worn by the feet of several generations, and its

on hand-rails, with their rusty ornaments, were bent and twisted. Lights gleamed in many of the windows; for, where one family had lived in moderate comfort, there were now half a dozen families crowded into tenements of one and two rooms.

Archer opened the front door. As he did so, a man darted out, carrying a tin pail on his arm—an Italian, bound to the nearest saloon for beer.

There was a dim light in the hall. It illuminated faintly the lower part of the rickety old stairs that led into the upper darkness, and it was not bright enough to outshine the bright lines under the doors that led into the various rooms on this first floor. Somewhere in the house Arthur was talking with Salton.

Stepping lightly through the hall, Archer listened at the different doors. Through one came the rapid talk of Italians. At another, no sound was to be heard, though he waited a full minute. The last door gave out to him the voice of a woman scolding.

Satisfied that he would have to go higher, Archer mounted the stairs. From none of the rooms on the second floor came the sound of a familiar voice, and he continued up to the third floor, feeling his way carefully. Here two of the rooms were dark. But through the keyhole of the third door, which shut off the room in the rear, shone a light.

Archer tiptoed close, and listened. A man was speaking in a low voice. The words were not distinguishable. For some time the monotone continued; then it stopped abruptly, and Archer heard Arthur say:

"It was a foolish wager, but I will gladly pay it."

The monotone began its answer.

Archer tried the door. It was locked. He made no attempt to be quiet, but turned the knob quickly, as though he had the right to enter, and when he found that he could not get in, he rapped lightly but sharply. An intuition had come to Archer that if he tried the door and then rapped without hesitation, Salton would think that it was his scout come with a warning.

The monotone had ceased when the knob rattled. Now the same voice was raised to say:

"Open the door, Crane. It's Mike."

That voice, speaking thus distinctly, was not strange to Archer. While steps were coming across the room and the latch had been slipped back, he tried to remember where he might have heard it. Then the door opened, and, looking past Arthur, he saw a man seated behind a deal-table at the other side of the room.

The man was Tousey.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CRIMINAL.

DURING the time it took Arthur to step across the threshold and into the room, he was able to see clearly that the identity of Salton with his former servant was something that he might long ago have guessed. There was no doubt that the man at the table was Salton as well as Tousey. And he was not a humble Tousey, nor a frightened Tousey, but an alert, commanding Tousey, with a hard mouth and a relentless eye.

At sight of Archer he laid a revolver on the table before him—one of those wicked, automatic weapons that can be emptied in a few seconds. Evidently it had been lying in his lap, and was now made conspicuous as a symbol of his true mastery of the situation.

He did not speak until the door had been closed and the two friends were advancing toward him. Then he said in an incisive voice:

"Stay where you are."

The words were accompanied by a scarcely perceptible movement of his fingers, which seemed to caress the revolver.

Archer and Arthur halted. There were no chairs besides the one in which Tousey—or Salton—was sitting, so they were obliged to stand there like prisoners before a magistrate. The paradox of this simile struck Archer humorously, and he found himself smiling.

"How did you get here, Dr. Archer?" asked the man at the table.

"I followed Mr. Crane. What do you call yourself now, Tousey? Or is it Salton?"

"Make it Salton. That name has served me longer than Tousey—which, as you may have realized, is a name in the servant class." He grinned evilly,

and looked from Archer to his friend and back again. "You are not supposed to be here, doctor," he continued. "I regard your presence as a violation of my tacit understanding with Crane."

"Indeed? Well, since I am acquainted with the matter at hand, and since I am in a way involved, perhaps there is some advantage in my being here."

Salton meditated. "When you came, I was speaking to Crane about a little wager we made a few weeks ago. You have heard the story?"

Archer nodded.

"Crane was offering to pay the wager at once—which is quite gratifying. I am rather short of funds. This apartment—" he waved his hand to call attention to the bare room.

"Is evidently an office, since there is no bed."

"Yes, yes. But to come to the point." He studied the two men before him as if to make certain how far he should go with them. "That wager is a paltry sum. I really need much more. If my friend Crane will consent to make me a loan—quite a large loan—"

"I will come to the point," exclaimed Archer.

"Let Crane talk. It is his affair."

"Mine too," insisted Archer. "You are my servant—"

"Was."

"Well, then, was. Certain things you did while in my employ were done by using means which were available only in my house. What is the use of beating about the bush? Salton, you killed Abraham Walsh."

"Yes," said Salton coolly. "I killed him—by arrangement with his nephew and your friend."

Arthur uttered a hoarse cry and took a step toward his smiling enemy, but Archer caught his sleeve.

"Steady, Arthur!" he said, in an undertone; and then: "It was very cleverly planned. Salton. Would your mind satisfying my curiosity a little?"

"Ask your questions. If I choose to answer them. I will." He leaned back in his chair.

"How did you come to take a position with me?"

"Ask me something harder," said Salton with a grin. "When I got back

from Paris I figured you out as a convenient approach to Walsh. Our friend, here, had told me about you. I called when I knew you were out, and cultivated the acquaintance of your door-man. An alluring offer which I presented to him tempted him to go West, and meantime I went to the agency where you get your help and had myself listed for the kind of a job you might have to offer. The rest was easy. Think out the details for yourself."

"But your credentials?"

"They were easy to write. My winning ways helped them to pass muster."

"Where did you get the idea of poisoning an envelope?"

"Thought it out on the ship coming over. Crane had given me a pretty good line on his uncle's peculiarities. I nosed out that little sheep of a secretary—Jepson—and suggested that if Dr. Archer would write to old Walsh about our friend here, it might do some good. Jepson was easy. He took me for a Scottish earl, traveling incog, and he laid his heart bare—just as Crane did."

Archer frowned. The little secretary must have talked about Enid.

"He boasted to me," continued Salton, "that Miss Crane often asked his advice about her brother. It was easy to see that he would give her my suggestion as his own."

The calmness with which Salton was making his enormous confession chilled Archer with a horror greater than any show of fear or remorse could have aroused. But he suppressed his growing desire to leap to the table and strangle the man.

"And how did you get hold of the Exina?" he asked.

"Exina?"

"The poison."

"Oh, that's the name of it, is it? I watched you pretty closely, doctor. It wasn't hard to fit a key to your laboratory door. The day Miss Crane called, I knew pretty well what it meant, for Jepson had kept me informed. I heard most of her talk with you. The door is not very thick." He paused, and smiled reminiscently.

"When you went out with her you left the letter in the hall to be mailed. I opened it, and took the return envelope

down to your laboratory. There was some stuff in a glass retort—some stuff that looked dangerous—and from what you and Miss Crane had been saying I knew it must be poison. To make sure, I dipped a stick in it and went up-stairs and shoved the stick into the mouth of one of your guinea-pigs. It worked.

"Then I twisted a paper spill and went back to the laboratory. The stuff in the retort was pretty thick—like syrup. It was crystallizing at the top. I dipped the spill into it, and smeared the gum on the envelope. Then I went up to your office, and burned the spill, and held the envelope near the fire till it was dry. I put it back with the letter and resealed the whole thing, and took it out to the corner and mailed it. See how simple it was?"

Archer was silent. He still kept a restraining hand on Arthur's arm, for the recital was having an enraging effect on the painter. He was breathing hard and his eyes showed the strain that he was under.

"As soon as the newsboys began to call their extras on the street the next afternoon, I went out and bought a paper. I had succeeded. All that remained was to make my getaway. So I came in and flashed that phoney bill on you." He laughed. "You thought I was a pretty stupid sort of an ass."

"I still think so," said Archer.

"Don't count on that." A look of annoyance passed over Salton's face. Apparently he was proud of his own cleverness.

"It was only by the merest chance that Mr. Walsh sealed that envelope himself. Jepson might have got the poison."

"I took that chance," admitted Salton. "But I figured that the letter would make the old man so angry that he would 'tend to it himself. It seems to have worked out that way."

There was silence. The man who had told this terrible story was evidently enjoying the effect he had created on his listeners. His lean, hard face wore a look of self-satisfaction. There was not a trace of remorse.

Arthur's condition was pitiable. His legs gave under him, and his hands worked convulsively.

"I have given you the details," Salton

began after a few moments, "partly to satisfy your curiosity, but more especially to let you and your friend see how fully my claims upon his consideration have been established. I won't mince matters. I want a lot of money."

"On what ground?" asked Archer.

Salton tapped his left hand against his breast-pocket.

"On the ground of a little piece of paper—signed by our friend, and indicating an arrangement for the putting-away of Abraham Walsh."

"And how can you use that paper without incriminating yourself?" demanded Archer.

Salton smiled. "A few hints—an anonymous letter or two—and our friend will have to face an ordeal of questions. Does he look to you as though he could pass through such a crisis without giving himself away?"

"And you, too."

"Oh, I know how to get out of sight. I might even put the paper in the hands of the police. They would never find me." He spoke with easy contempt.

"You set an ingenious trap for Mr. Crane," said Archer. "Innocently he fell into it. But he has done no wrong."

"It will be hard to prove that he has done no wrong. In fact, it will be impossible."

"Not exactly impossible."

"Perhaps not. But even if he should escape, think of the anguish, think of the scandal. Really, it will be much simpler for him to buy that piece of paper from me."

"What price do you set?" exclaimed Arthur hoarsely. "How much Salton? How much?"

"Not so fast, not so fast. We must come to an equitable arrangement."

"Equitable!" muttered Archer.

"Yes. Why not? Crane did desire his uncle's death. I was willing to bring it to pass. Do you think I ran no risk? Surely, any fair man would admit that I am justly entitled to something."

Archer gave an exclamation of disgust.

"Don't be supercilious, doctor," sneered Salton. "I'll warrant you've been responsible for more than one death yourself—and have not refused your fees."

"You cursed devil!" cried Arthur.

"Hush!" whispered Archer. "Now, Salton, do you really carry that damaging bit of paper around with you?"

"I do."

"Aren't you afraid it may be taken away from you?"

"I can look out for myself."

"But there are two of us here, Salton."

"Against me, and—this." He pointed to the revolver. "Come! Let us talk business. What do you say, Crane?"

"One moment," Archer interrupted. "Let me say something first." He gazed sternly at Salton. "You have committed a vile murder. You are trying to involve in it an innocent man. You have been very clever, very ingenious. But you have overlooked one fact."

"Well?"

"Neither you nor any one else can ever prove that Abraham Walsh did not die a natural death. You may turn over to the authorities Arthur's written promise to pay. You may give it to the newspapers. The public will blame him for his folly, but they can never accuse him of a crime of which there is not the least evidence. They will say that he did a reckless thing; and they will conclude that Providence has punished him."

"An examination of the body—" began Salton readily.

"Will establish nothing at all. Your own cleverness has defeated you, Salton. You were too ingenious, too subtle, too careful to protect yourself. The poisoned envelope was returned to me. It has been destroyed. There is no other external evidence."

"But the body, doctor—"

"The poison which you took from my laboratory leaves absolutely no trace. All the scientists in the world could not determine that Abraham Walsh died from other than natural causes."

Salton tapped the table nervously with his fingers.

"You should have used arsenic, Salton. Or you might have shot the old man through one of the windows of the house. At least, you should have made the crime obvious. As it is, your case against Mr. Crane has nothing to stand on—and the only satisfaction that re-

mains for you is that not even against you, the murderer, can the crime be proved."

CHAPTER XV.

RETRIBUTION.

SALTON looked at Archer for a long time. He was thinking, calculating.

"You talk as though what you say was the goods," he admitted at last.

"It is the goods."

"But what about Arthur Crane's conscience?" he exclaimed triumphantly. "Don't you see that he will confess if they ever press him? There's nothing like conscience to make a man blab. No, he's not safe unless I back him up."

"His conscience can rest easy."

"But it won't, I tell you. Crane, I've got you cold. You might escape the chair, but you would be wrecked for life, and you know it. You aren't going to slip out of this. The money is coming to me—not a thousand, but millions."

Arthur threw off the detaining hand of Archer.

"Give me the paper!" he cried.

"Not so loud," admonished Salton.

"Give me the paper!" Arthur extended his hand.

"When I get ready," smiled Salton.

Like a flash, Arthur sprang at the table. The distance was not more than two paces, and he cleared it in one bound.

Salton jumped to his feet. He raised the revolver, as if to fire, but, changing his mind, shifted the barrel to his hand and, leaning forward, brought the butt down on Arthur's skull.

Without a sound, Arthur went to the floor, his right hand slapping the table as he fell.

All this had happened in an instant. Archer had not foreseen it—had not had time to rush to the assistance of his friend. Perhaps it was just as well that he had not, for, in that event, Salton would probably have shot them both, instead of striking the one. Regardless of Salton, who was stepping out from behind the table, Archer quickly knelt beside the unconscious figure. So far as he could tell from a hasty glance, Arthur was not breathing.

"You've done it this time, Salton," he said with a trembling voice, looking up at the man who stood above him.

The transformation in Salton was startling. His face was livid. His one last chance of a fortune in blackmail seemed to have been lost because he had struck too hard.

"No!" he shouted. "No! It can't be. Why, I—"

Archer nodded sadly.

"Then," exclaimed Salton, his face contorted with a sudden, baffled rage, "I'll make an end of you, too." He pointed the revolver down at Archer.

"Why add to your crimes?" asked Archer.

As he spoke, his hand, which he had left on Arthur's breast, felt the movement of a long, sighing breath. Arthur was alive. But Archer kept the joy of that discovery out of his face.

A knock sounded at the door. Salton started.

"Who's there?" he called.

"Open the door!"

The command was authoritative, but Salton stood staring at the body on the floor. His revolver arm had dropped to his side. Now he raised it again and pointed at Archer.

Some one was throwing himself against the door repeatedly. It was giving on its hinges.

"You seem to be wanted, Salton," said Archer, still staring into the muzzle of the weapon.

Salton stepped back. His face showed fear. He turned toward the window, seeking a way to escape; but even as he looked, a man in police uniform appeared on the platform of the fire-escape outside.

Crash! The door was yielding.

Crash! The upper hinge had given way.

Irresolutely, Salton looked from window to door, then pointed his revolver again at Archer. His eyes showed his angry purpose. If he had been trapped, he would pay the man who had trapped him. His finger contracted on the trigger.

But there came a report from the window, followed at once by the tinkle of broken glass. The officer on the fire-escape had shot through the pane.

Salton staggered back to the wall. For a moment he leaned against it, then slowly slid down. There was blood on his body. He lay quite still.

In the pause that followed the shot, one thought took possession of Archer's mind. The paper! The police must not find it. They would soon be in the room. The officer on the fire-escape was already raising the window.

Archer got up from his knees and hurried over to Salton's body. The bullet-hole was in the left breast, close above the heart. The man was already dead.

Reaching swiftly into the breast-pocket, he drew out a paper. There was a hole through it, and it was stained with blood. He thrust it into his own pocket and arose, just as the policeman rushed toward him from the window and three others came tumbling through the doorway.

"The man is dead," said Archer.

The leader of the men who had broken in the door pushed the others back.

"You are Dr. Archer," he said. "I remember you when you were with the Bellevue ambulance."

Archer nodded.

"What are you doing here?"

Archer pointed to the body of Salton. "This man was in my employ, as a servant," he said. "Last week he left me, and later I missed something from my laboratory. My friend and I came to see him. He stunned my friend with the butt of his revolver. At first I thought that he had killed him. He would have shot me, if—"

"That was a lucky shot of yours, Carney," said the leader, turning to the man who had come in through the window. "You had a close shave, Dr. Archer," he added. "This man"—he touched the huddled, bleeding body with his fist—"was Billy McPherson. He was booked for the chair for killing a fellow in Frisco, after the earthquake. One of our plain-clothes men caught Red Mike not far from here a little while ago, and, to save himself, he peached on McPherson. That's what brought us. You'll appear at the inquest?"

"Of course," said Archer.

"Then I guess you needn't stay now. How about your friend?"

"I don't believe he'll be able to be

at the inquest. But he won't be needed, will he?"

"I guess the coroner won't want him. You can tell all that needs to be told, doctor, and Carney saw the finish."

"Then, if one of you will help me get my friend down to a cab—"

"Sure. Here, Billings. Help Dr. Archer."

Arthur had opened his eyes. As Archer and his helper bent down to raise him, he asked feebly:

"What happened?"

"You got a crack on the head, old boy. It's all right. Don't try to think."

They got him down the stairs, past the gaping crowd of tenement-dwellers, into a cab, and drove to Archer's house. There Arthur was put to bed. No serious hurt had been done.

It was late, but Enid had to be considered. She would be waiting and wondering. Archer was about to telephone, but he realized that such a message would not fully reassure her; so, in spite of the hour, he hurried through the streets to the house. Waiting at the door for an answer to his ring, he pondered on the undiscovered crime that had taken place within its dingy walls. Old Walsh had gone whither he could not take his millions; and those to whom he had left them did not want them.

The guilty man had received his punishment. The innocent who had been so close to guilt had suffered enough. In the furnace of experience, Arthur had burned away the dross that was in him. He would come out of it more a man.

Enid had not retired. Surprised to see him so late, she stood in the hall and

waited for him to speak, while the servant who had hastily clothed himself to answer the bell disappeared through a door at the back.

"Arthur and I," he began quietly, "have had a little adventure."

"Is he hurt? Tell me." She laid her hand on his arm.

"Nothing at all serious. He was struck on the head, but he will be all right in the morning. I took him to my house, where I can look out for him."

"What happened, John?"

"A little trouble with a former servant of mine—that fellow, Tousey. You may remember him. I will tell you about it to-morrow."

"Won't you come in?" She started to lead the way to the reception-room.

"No, dear," he said.

He had spoken the word. She stood still. He could see the red flush spread over her half-averted cheek.

"Enid!" he whispered.

And when she did not look or answer, he went over to her and drew her into his arms.

"But why," he asked, when for the hundredth time they had told each other how long they had cared—"why do you suppose that little Jepson mailed that letter to me, after—"

"You dear, stupid John," she whispered. "Don't you understand? Even he saw that you—how you felt about me—and he thought that that word of uncle's might keep you away."

"I was a fool," he said, as she nestled her face on his shoulder. "But we all make mistakes, don't we, sweet? Thank Heaven, we do not always have to pay for them too dearly!"

(The End.)

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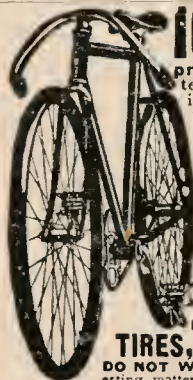
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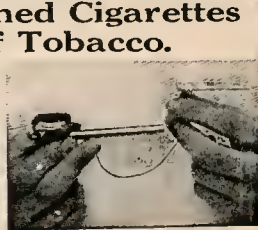
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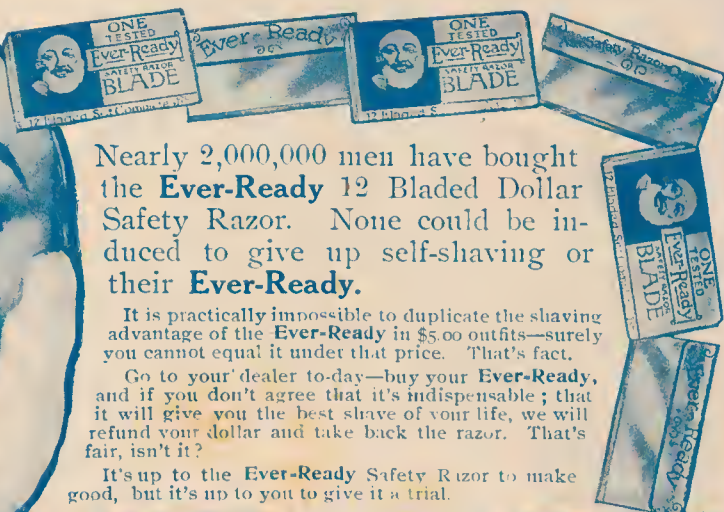
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